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NEW MEXICO OCCUPANT SEAT BELT OBSERVATION STUDY

DAYTIME / NIGHTTIME SURVEYS

STATE OF NEW MEXICO

Governor: **The Honorable Michelle Lujan Grisham**

NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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NMDOT

NEW MEXICO
OCCUPANT SEAT BELT



OBSERVATION STUDY



**NEW MEXICO
OCCUPANT
SEAT BELT
OBSERVATION
STUDY**

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A photograph of a multi-lane highway with traffic. A large white semi-truck is on the left, and a white pickup truck and a white Hertz van are in the middle lanes. Road signs for 'EXIT 166', 'Juan Tabo Blvd', and '3/4 MILE' are visible. A green sign above the road indicates '17 FT 9 IN' clearance.

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REPORT ORGANIZATION

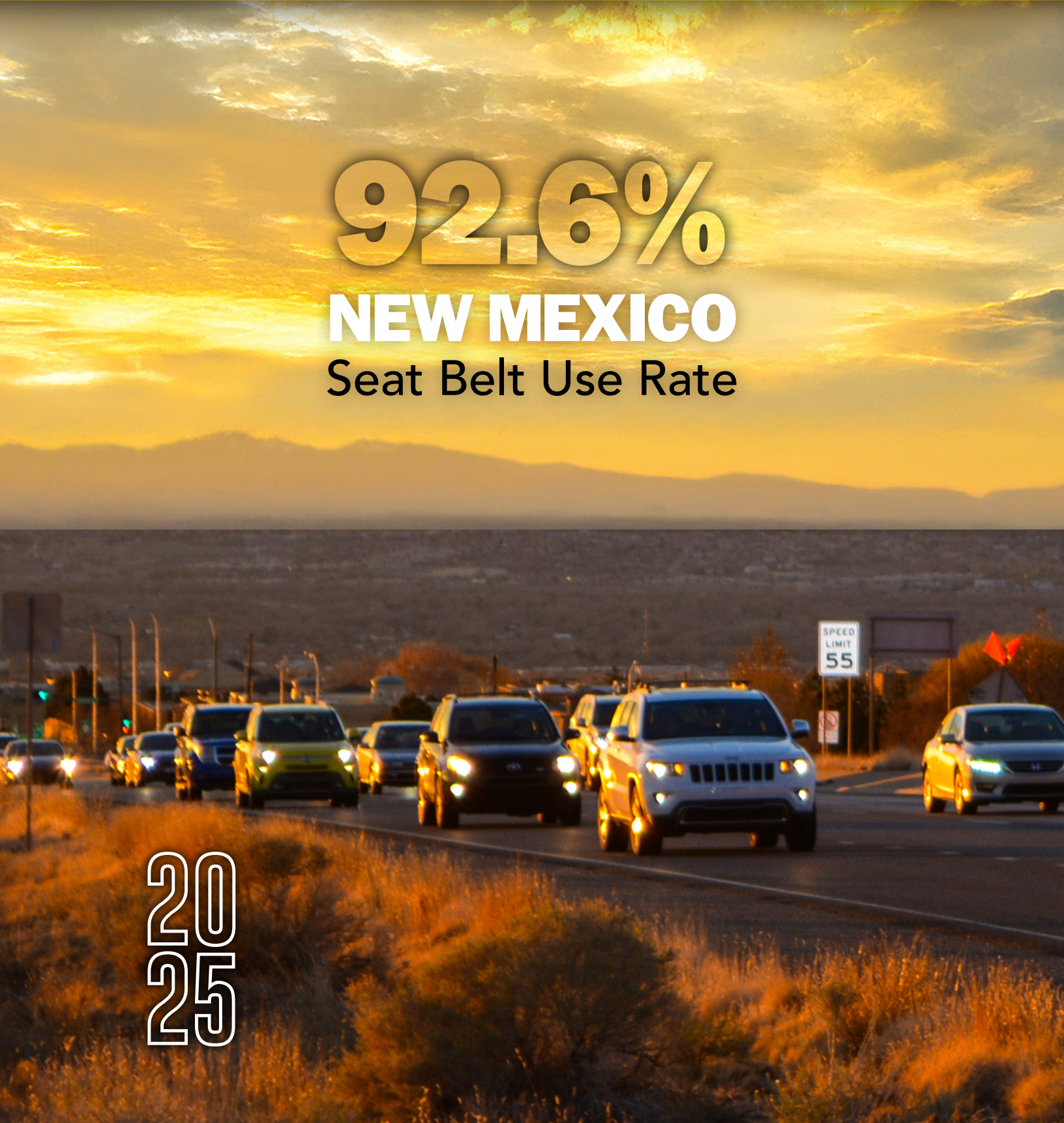
This report summarizes the results of New Mexico's 2025 Occupant Seat Belt Observation Study providing daytime and nighttime seat belt results. Recommendations based on the findings are presented. Appendices are provided at the end of the report.

92.6%

NEW MEXICO

Seat Belt Use Rate

20 25





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2025 New Mexico Occupant Seat Belt Observation Study (Daytime)

The purpose of the study is to provide a statewide estimate of daytime seat belt use using a National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) approved sampling design. New Mexico's safety belt observation methodology has evolved considerably since the first surveys conducted in 1982. The current report will show seat belt results from 2005 to present.

Prior to the 2023 survey, the road segments used for New Mexico's statewide seat belt survey were resampled to be consistent with federal regulations, which require a resampling of sites every five years. The sites were selected in a manner identical to that described in the approved survey design (created in 2013) but using updated data. Thus, 2023 observations occurred at brand new sites which are different from the sites used for the 2018 through 2022 surveys. The 2023 sites were used again for the 2024 and 2025 observations.

Road segments from 19 of New Mexico's 33 counties (accounting for at least 85% of passenger vehicle crash-related fatalities) were sampled for inclusion in the survey. A total of 94 segments were observed with 28 on Primary highways and 33 each on Secondary and Local Roads. All passenger vehicles (cars, pickups, vans, and SUVs) with a gross vehicle weight up to 10,000 pounds were observed in the survey including small commercial vehicles. The target population was all drivers and right front seat passengers (excluding middle passengers and children harnessed in child safety seats) of vehicles traveling on public roads between the hours of 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. The observation period for each selected road segment was 20 minutes.

Quality control measures enacted during the study included: ensuring qualified individuals conducted observations, assigning sites within relatively close geographic proximity as data collection clusters to increase efficiency and minimize travel costs, and ensuring quality control monitors made random, unannounced visits to at least five percent of the observation sites to evaluate the observer's performance from a distance (if possible) and then work alongside the observer.

Pre- and post-Click It or Ticket (CIOT) data collection waves with the number of vehicles, total occupants, drivers, and passengers observed are noted below.



2025	Vehicles	Occupants	Drivers	Passengers
PRE-Campaign	4,829	5,870	4,829	1,041
POST-Campaign	5,118	6,142	5,118	1,024

Daytime data collection efforts for the 2025 New Mexico Occupant Seat Belt Observation Survey included a pre-measure conducted in April 2025 and a post-measure conducted between May 29 and June 13, 2025. Five observers gathered observation data for both waves.

The weighted seat belt use rate for June 2025 is 92.6%. Analyses were also conducted using weighted data to explore pre-to-post program changes in daytime belt use for 2025. New Mexico drivers and front outboard passengers had a seat belt use rate of 93.5% during the pre-measure and 92.6% for the post-campaign measure. Confidence intervals indicate the change from pre-to-post was not significant (at $p=0.05$). Unweighted data were used for all remaining analyses.

Driver belt use did not change pre-to-post (93.7%), and the passenger use rate only slightly decreased (94.2% to 94.1%; not significant). Pickup Truck seat belt use decreased non-significantly from pre-to-post (92.6% and 91.9%, respectively). Car/Van/SUV seat belt use had a small increase pre-to-post (94.3% to 94.6%, respectively), but that change was also non significant. Road stratification analyses showed slight changes from pre-to-post CIOT. Primary road belt use decreased slightly from 95.0% to 94.8% (not significant) and Secondary Road belt use also decreased (93.9% and 92.7% pre-to-post; also not significant). However, Local Road belt use increased from 87.7% (pre) to 91.9% (post; not significant).

The difference between Car/Van/SUV Driver and Pickup Truck Driver seat belt use post-measures (94.4% and 92.2%, respectively) however, is statistically significant. As is the difference between Car/Van/SUV Passenger belt use (95.5%) and Pickup Truck Passenger belt use (89.9%) was also significant.

For the June measure, 3,613 occupants were observed on Primary Roads, 1,777 occupants were observed on Secondary Roads, and 752 occupants were observed on Local Roads. Occupants on Primary Roads had the highest seat belt usage rates (at 94.8%), followed by Secondary Roads (92.7%). Local Roads yielded lower use rates (91.9%).

Daytime seat belt use in New Mexico decreased from an all-time-high of 93.6% in June 2024 to 92.6% in June 2025. This marks the first year-to-year rate decrease after three yearly increases in a row. Prior to the 2022 (initial recent) increase, the 2019 rate (91.8%) was the first annual increase in several years. The 2020 rate (89.7%) continued a downward trend that existed aside from the 2019 rate. That is, the increase in 2019 may have been a chance occurrence. It may also be the case that the global pandemic played a role in the 2020-2022 lower usage levels. This impact may have been due to the increase (at least anecdotally) of higher risk drivers making up a higher percentage of the total drivers or even by lower levels of law enforcement efforts (noting that this may be exacerbated by the events of 2020 condemning law enforcement).



NIGHTTIME Seat Belt Use Rate

87%

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2025 New Mexico Occupant Seat Belt Observation Study (Nighttime)

The 10th New Mexico Nighttime Occupant Seat Belt Observation Study occurred in 2025. This study provides a statewide estimate of seat belt use for night occupants using a 34-site subset of the 94 sites in the 2013 NHTSA-approved sample for daytime belt use. Sites did not change with subsequent daytime resamples, so the night sites have remained the same over the years, including the 2025 measure. This allows us to better gauge change over time at night.

Safer New Mexico Now and Preusser Research Group observers partnered to conduct the nighttime survey for adults in front seat outboard positions using night vision equipment when needed. The same vehicle and driver characteristics used to select vehicles for daytime observation were used in night observations, but a few changes were made to the protocol to facilitate nighttime data collection. Observations were made for vehicles traveling on public roads between the hours of 8:45 p.m. and 2 a.m. The observation period for each selected road segment was 45 minutes. The road segments remained the same, though the observer was permitted to adjust the location for vantage points in case of unsafe conditions and/or lighting conditions.

Observations at night were always conducted by a two-person team with one person acting as the observer and the other documenting the observation data as verbalized by the observer. Attempts were made to conduct night observations in locations with adequate overhead lighting when possible. Observers only used night vision equipment when roadway lighting was insufficient to make natural observations.

Data collection for the 2025 New Mexico Nighttime Occupant Seat Belt Observation Survey was conducted from July 25 - 30. Six observers gathered observation data over the 2025 study period with 1,131 vehicles observed, and belt use noted for 1,426 occupants.

Shoulder belt use status was observed and recorded on 1,426 front seat occupants, including 1,131 drivers and 295 passengers. New Mexico nighttime drivers and front outboard passengers had a combined unweighted seat belt use of 87.0%. Driver usage was recorded at 85.6% and front seat outboard passenger usage at 92.2%.

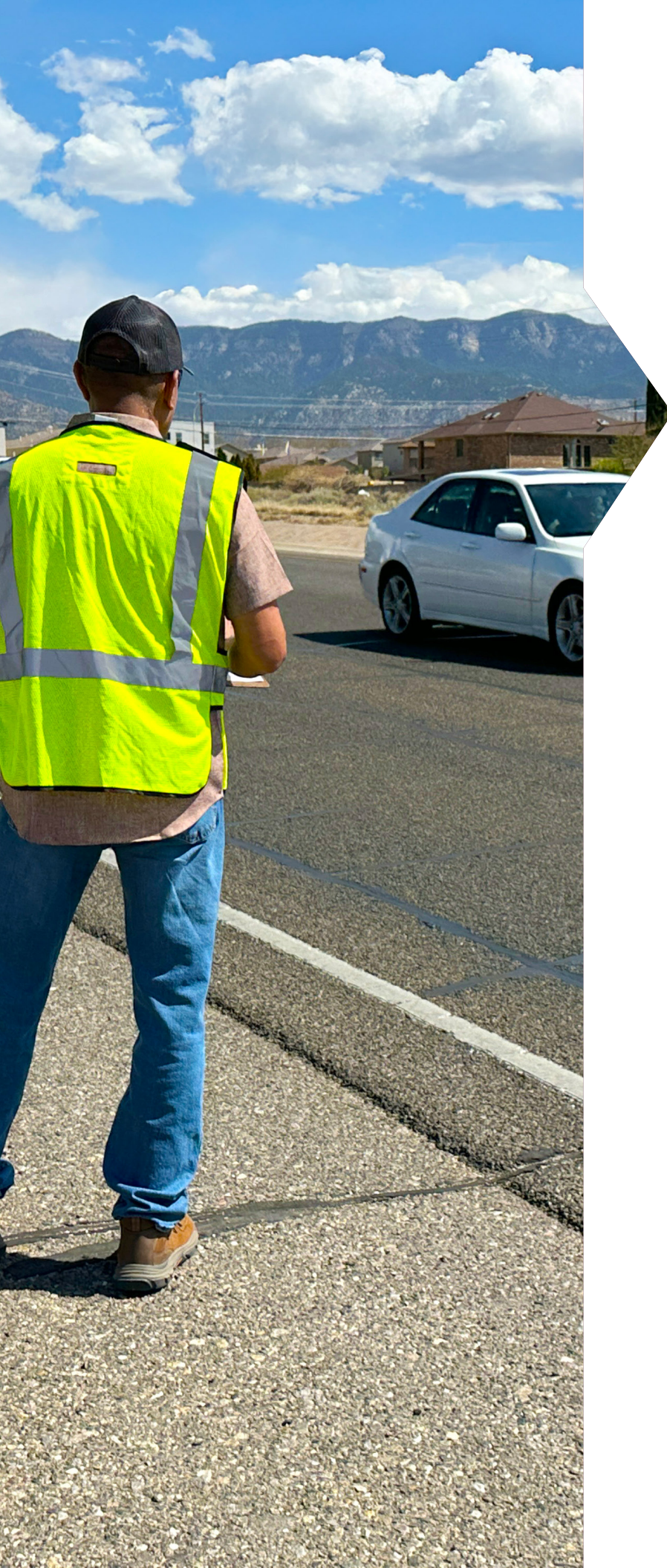
Shoulder belt use status in Cars/Van/SUV categories were observed and recorded on 1,150 front seat occupants, including 899 drivers and 251 passengers. Nighttime drivers and front outboard passengers in these vehicle categories had a combined seat belt use of 88.0%. Driver usage was recorded at 86.7% and front seat outboard passenger usage at 92.8%. Pickup driver nighttime seat belt use for drivers and front outboard passengers combined was 82.6%. Pickup Truck Driver use was recorded at 81.5% and front passenger seat belt use was recorded at 88.6%.

During the 2025 nighttime surveying period, 869 occupants were observed on Primary Roads, 251 occupants were observed on Secondary Roads, and 306 occupants were observed on Local Roads. Secondary Roads had the highest nighttime seat belt usage at 88.8%, followed closely by Primary Roads at 88.5%. The lowest percentage of seat belt usage was observed on Local Roads at 81.0%.

Each year, nighttime seat belt observations took place one to two months following implementation of the CIOT high visibility enforcement campaign. A 2.2 percentage point reduction in use was observed from 2016 to 2017, and usage further decreased two percentage points in 2018 (86.0%). There was a use rate increase of 1.5 percentage points in 2019 (87.5%), however the 2021 rate decreased by the same 1.5 percentage points (86.0%), and for 2022, further decreased by 0.7 percentage points (to 85.3%). In 2023, the rate increased 0.6 percentage points to 85.9% increased further in 2024 (0.8%) to 86.7% and increased another 0.3 percentage points to 87.0% in 2025. As with daytime belt use, Pickup Truck drivers demonstrate lower nighttime belt use. These should be considered important populations to target. The raw, unweighted nighttime rate was over nine percentage points lower than the raw, unweighted June daytime rate (91.9%).



Nighttime seat belt study video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-1SJs8anNc>



NEW MEXICO OCCUPANT SEAT BELT OBSERVATION STUDY

Recommendations

Prior to the 2025 measure, New Mexico's seat belt use rate had been increasing the past few years, reversing a several year decline (with the exception of 2019 when there was an anomalous increase). However, the rate for June 2025 (92.6%) surpasses the 90% benchmark for the third time since 2019 and is not statistically different than June 2024's rate (93.6%), the highest rate measured to date.

The recent rebound in daytime use coupled with a slight increases in nighttime use relative to prior years could indicate that the broader years-long decline in use rates could be reversing. It is possible that since 2023, the negative impacting elements of 2020 (civil unrest and global pandemic) have been left behind and usage rates are beginning to recover.

That said, low usage groups remain. As with prior recommendations timely and strong programming should be undertaken to, hopefully, increase the seat belt use rate in the state. There are many factors that can impact use rates like type or intensity of media or seat belt enforcement. High visibility enforcement in particular is generally considered to be the best means for achieving increases in belt use.

As with previous years, there are areas deserving of extra efforts to continue to make New Mexico roads safer. Particularly, occupants in Pickup Trucks and those travelling on Local Roads have the lowest daytime seat belt use rates. In addition, findings from the nighttime study showed lower seat belt use for those same subgroups of occupants.

REPORT ORGANIZATION

This report summarizes the results of the 2025 New Mexico Occupant Seat Belt Observation Survey conducted since 1982. It continues the presentation of nighttime observation data which began in 2015. Both the daytime and nighttime surveys have a section in the report with seven subsections:

- 1 Study Purpose**
- 2 Study Design Overview**
- 3 Sampling**
- 4 Observer Selection, Training, and On-Site Procedures**
- 5 Data Collection and Analysis**
- 6 Results**
- 7 Discussion**



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DAYTIME

2025 New Mexico Occupant Seat Belt Observation Study (Daytime)

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study is to use a NHTSA-approved sampling design to provide the state of New Mexico with a statewide estimate of seat belt use. In 2023, the road segments used for New Mexico's statewide seat belt survey were resampled to be consistent with federal regulations, which require a resampling of sites every five years. The sites were selected in a manner identical to that described in the approved survey design (created in 2013) but using updated data. Sites were selected based on weighted random probability assessment of road segments from 19 New Mexico counties. These counties contained 85% of all motor vehicle occupant fatalities over the past several years (at the time of survey design). Thus, observations for the 2023 survey occurred at brand new sites; different from those observed for the 2018 through 2022 surveys. The 2023 survey sites were also used for the 2024 and 2025 surveys.

Preusser Research Group was contracted by the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT), Traffic Safety Division (TSD) to conduct the 2025 New Mexico Occupant Seat Belt Observation Study. Observers from the local organization Safer New Mexico Now provided Preusser Research Group with experienced local personnel who surveyed seat belt use for adults in front seat outboard positions at 94 sites for both a pre- and post-CIOT campaign measure.

Study Design Overview

Several research designs for belt use rates have been implemented since law implementation in 1982. The NHTSA 2011 issuance of new Uniform Criteria for State Observational Surveys of Seat Belt Use resulted in new approved design being implemented for the seat belt survey years since 2013.

Sites selected in the 2023 resample were used for the 2025 survey as mandated by NHTSA following the same site selection criteria as the previous design. Road segments from 19 of New Mexico's 33 counties (accounting for 85.4% of passenger vehicle crash-related fatalities) were sampled for inclusion in the survey. The road segments were divided into Primary, Secondary, or Local road classifications for stratification and sampling selection.

The target population included all drivers and right front seat passengers (excluding middle passengers and children harnessed in child safety seats) of vehicles traveling on public roads between the hours of 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. All passenger vehicles (Cars, Pickup Trucks, Vans, and SUVs) with a gross vehicle weight up to 10,000 pounds were observed in the survey. Observations included small commercial vehicles. The observation period for each selected road segment was 20 minutes. The road segments vary in length, permitting the observer to adjust for vantage point in case of unsafe conditions at the usual observation location. Data collection was conducted by trained observers, all who participated in previous seat belt surveys. Data were entered and analyzed by Preusser Research Group.

Sampling

As new redesigns were implemented over the years, the sampling segments that were used varied for the annual rates calculated and reported in this document. There was a new design in 2012 which was revised in 2013, and the current survey sites were resampled (as required by federal regulation) using the design developed in 2013.

For the 2012 survey, a file of road segments was obtained from NHTSA containing 2010 TIGER data developed by the U.S. Census Bureau. These segments are classified by the U.S. Census Bureau using the MAF/TIGER Feature Class Code (MTFCC) with the three main classifications of Primary Roads, Secondary Roads, and Local Roads. Road segment listings in the file included those designations along with specified segment lengths as determined by TIGER. This descriptive information allowed for stratification of road segments by MTFCC. A systematic Probability Proportional to Size (PPS) sampling (with no certainty sites) was employed to then select the road segments to be used as observation sites. These were used for the data collection years of 2012 to current.

The same 108 road segments had been used for seat belt observations from 1998 through 2012. This was reduced to 94 segments in 2013 with 28 on Primary highways and 33 each on Secondary and Local Roads. These reductions were structured to manage resources most effectively while also meeting the NHTSA-required standard error rate of 2.5% or less. Additional data collection may be scheduled in instances where the standard error rates exceed required levels. Exclusion options were exercised to remove aberrant locations such as rural roads in non-MSA counties, non-public roads, unnamed roads, unpaved roads, vehicular trails, access ramps, cul-de-sacs, traffic circles, and service drives.

When any of these selected road segments become permanently unavailable, a reserve road segment is used. The reserve road segment sample consists of an additional 20% of road segments per MTFCC. More detailed information about the sampling methodology can be found in the Appendix of the 2014 report (Davis, Pearce & Logstead, 2014).

The same method described for the 2013 redesign was used to sample new sites for both the 2018 and 2023 surveys. The distribution of sites across roadway type remained consistent.

Observer Selection, Training, and On-site Procedures

Qualified individuals meeting New Mexico-established criteria conducted the observations. A three-hour refresher training was held. Practice surveys were completed and checks for inter-observer consistency were performed. Maps showing the location of all observation sites and Site Assignment Sheets were provided to the observers. These indicated the observed road name, the crossroad included within the road segment (or nearest crossroad), assigned date, assigned time, and assigned direction of travel. Sites within relatively close geographic proximity are assigned as data collection clusters to minimize travel costs.

DURING THE SITE SURVEY, THE OBSERVER:

Observed as many lanes of traffic as could be comfortably monitored while obtaining data on 99% of the vehicles

Observed only one predetermined direction of traffic (the opposite direction could be used and noted if sunshine in the eyes or other factors hampered observation)

Observed all passenger vehicles, including commercial vehicles weighing less than 10,000 pounds

Recorded seat belt use by both drivers and right front seat occupants, including children riding in booster seats (the only right front seat occupants excluded from the study were child passengers traveling in child car seats with harness straps)

All observers used audio recorders when observing high traffic volume segments and then transcribed them to the NMDOT Seat Belt Observation Form (Appendix II). Observers marked the forms directly during observation periods in low volume areas. Observers recorded belt use by marking the form appropriately for each person in each vehicle, with no marks made for absent passengers. The forms were then provided to PRG for data entry.

OCCUPANTS WERE RECORDED AS:

Belted if the shoulder belt was in front of the person's shoulder

Unbelted if the shoulder belt was not in front of the person's shoulder

Unknown if it could not reasonably be determined whether the driver or right front passenger was belted

Quality control monitors made random, unannounced visits to at least 5% of the observation sites. During these visits, the quality control monitor evaluated the observer's performance from a distance (if possible) and then worked alongside the observer. The quality control monitor ensured that the observer was following all survey protocols including arriving on time at assigned sites, completing the cover sheet and observation forms, and making accurate observations of seat belt use. The quality control monitor prepares site visit reports highlighting any problems with data collection site locations and observer performance. The quality control monitor also serves as a point of contact during the data collection should the observers have a question arising during this time.

Data Collection and Analysis

Daytime data collection efforts for the 2025 New Mexico Occupant Seat Belt Observation Survey included a pre-measure conducted in April 2025, and a post-measure conducted between May 29 and June 13, 2025. Four observers gathered observation data. Completed observation data forms were sent to Preusser Research Group for data entry using Excel and/or SPSS. Data cleaning procedures were performed including 10% entry checks to assess entry accuracy across all data entry forms completed and variable frequency counts to identify ineligible entry values or outliers.

Results

During the pre-measure, shoulder belt use was observed and recorded on 5,870 front seat occupants including 4,829 drivers and 1,041 passengers. Drivers accounted for 82.3% of people observed with passengers accounting for 17.7%. For the post-measure, shoulder belt use status was observed and recorded on 6,142 front seat occupants, including 5,118 drivers and 1,024 passengers. Drivers accounted for 83.3% of people observed with passengers accounting for 16.7%. These volumes and ratios are similar to previous measures.

A total of 151 (70 in pre and 81 in post) occupants (1.3%) of the entire observation sample for both waves combined were marked as seat belt use “unknown.” These cases were removed for weighting and analysis, but the overall numbers were well within allowable targeted observation limits therefore no sites needed to be re-observed.

The total number of vehicles and occupants observed for 2005 to 2025 post-measures are presented in Table 1 (Reduced numbers of vehicles and occupants observed beginning in 2013 resulted from a study design change). Probabilities to judge significance were set to 0.05. That is, the probability of a difference being due to chance must be less than 5% to deem the difference significant.

TABLE 1: VEHICLES AND OCCUPANTS OBSERVED IN OFFICIAL SEAT BELT SURVEYS, NEW MEXICO, 2005-2025

	2005	2006	2007	2008
Number of Observers	5	5	5	5
Total Vehicles Observed	15,540	15,362	15,085	15,153
Total Occupants Observed	18,378	17,836	17,593	17,525
	2009	2010	2011	2012
Number of Observers	4	4	4	4
Total Vehicles Observed	14,756	14,977	14,531	14,059
Total Occupants Observed	17,314	17,411	16,588	16,151
	2013	2014	2015	2016
Number of Observers	3	3	4	4
Total Vehicles Observed	5,215	3,870	6,540	6,660
Total Occupants Observed	6,874	5,013	8,449	8,530
	2017	2018	2019	2021
Number of Observers	4	4	4	4
Total Vehicles Observed	6,780	4,060	5,378	5,424
Total Occupants Observed	8,642	5,158	6,990	6,881
	2022	2023	2024	2025
Number of Observers	4	5	5	5
Total Vehicles Observed	5,050	5,255	4,968	5,118
Total Occupants Observed	6,410	6,579	6,090	6,142

Overall and Pre- to Post-Weighted Daytime Seat Belt Use

The official June daytime use rate for New Mexico in 2025 was 92.6%, compared to all-time high of 93.6% in June 2024. The 2024 and 2025 confidence intervals overlap (2025's was 90.16% to 94.97%, and 2024's was 91.04% to 96.07%), thus indicating no significant change. Analyses were also conducted to explore pre-to-post program changes in daytime belt use for 2025. New Mexico Drivers and front outboard Passengers had a seat belt use rate of 93.5% during the pre-measure; 0.9 percentage points higher than the June measurement, and this difference is also non-significant. All remaining analyses on belt use data are with unweighted data.

Categories of Daytime Seat Belt Use (Raw Data)

Pre-to-post analyses were conducted to identify changes in belt use during the campaign while examination of trends was used to explore belt use data going back to 2005. Tables 2A and 2B show the Driver, Passenger and combined occupant seat belt use rates gathered during the pre- and post-measures in 2025.

For the pre-measure, New Mexico Drivers had an unweighted seat belt use rate of 93.7%. The unweighted belt use rate for drivers remained at 93.7% for the post-measure. The unweighted percent of belted Passengers decreased only slightly pre-to-post, thus not significantly, from 94.2% to 94.1%.

TABLE 2A: PRE-ENFORCEMENT SEAT BELT USE 2025

Type of Vehicle	Number of Occupants Observed (PRE)	Seat Belt Use Percent (PRE)
Car/Van/SUVs (all)	4,161	94.3%
Driver	3,395	94.2%
Passenger	766	94.8%
Pickup Trucks (all)	1,709	92.6%
Driver	1,434	92.5%
Passenger	275	92.7%
All Vehicles (all)	5,870	93.8%
Driver	4,829	93.7%
Passenger	1,041	94.2%

TABLE 2B: POST-ENFORCEMENT SEAT BELT USE 2025

Type of Vehicle	Number of Occupants Observed (POST)	Seat Belt Use Percent (POST)
Car/Van/SUVs (all)	4,341	94.6%
Driver	3,565	94.4%
Passenger	776	95.5%
Pickup Trucks (all)	1,801	91.9%
Driver	1,553	92.2%
Passenger	248	89.9%
All Vehicles (all)	6,142	93.8%
Driver	5,118	93.7%
Passenger	1,024	94.1%

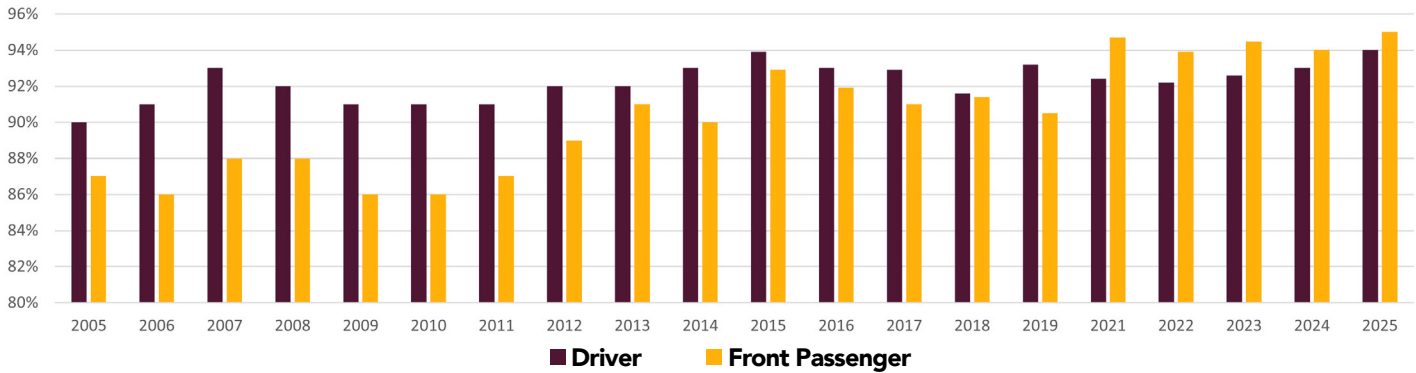
Changes pre- to post- belt use by vehicle type (Car, Truck, Van, and SUV) and road type (Primary, Secondary, and Local Roads) were also examined. Two vehicle categories were created, one which included Pickup Trucks only and one with Cars, SUVs, and Vans combined. The isolation of Pickup Trucks as their own category was due to the existence of previous analyses demonstrating that Pickup Trucks lag behind the other three vehicle types in seat belt use.

Pickup Truck seat belt use decreased from pre-to-post (92.6% to 91.9%), though not significantly. The higher volume Car/Van/SUV category seat belt use showed an increase, but a lesser difference in use pre to post (94.3% and 94.6%), so this was also non-significant.

The three road types were analyzed separately for pre-to-post changes in belt use. Primary Road belt use decreased slightly (non-significantly) from 95.0% to 94.8%. Secondary Road belt use also decreased from pre-to-post (93.9% to 92.7%, but also non-significant). Local Road belt use increased (from 87.7% to 91.9%), but unfortunately due to the low volume this finding is also non-significant.

Trend assessments of daytime seat belt use post-campaign showed that Driver and Passenger belt use rates by vehicle type have fluctuated only slightly in recent years. As shown by Figure 1, rounded to the nearest whole percentage, observed Car/Van/SUV Driver seat belt use rates reached a peak of 94% in 2015, decreased slightly to 93% in 2016 and 2017, and decreased further to 92% in 2018. In 2019, the rate increased to 93%. However, in 2021 the rate decreased to 92% where it remained in 2022 but rebounded to 93% for both 2023 and 2024. In 2025, Driver usage is revisiting its high from 2015 (94%). Passenger use showed a positive trend from 2010 to 2015 (peaking at 93%) and decreased slightly to 92% in 2016, and 91% in 2017, 2018, and 2019. Passenger seat belt use increased to 95% in 2021, but dropped slightly to 94% for 2022, where it remained for 2023 and 2024. In 2025, passenger usage is also revisiting its highest levels (95%).

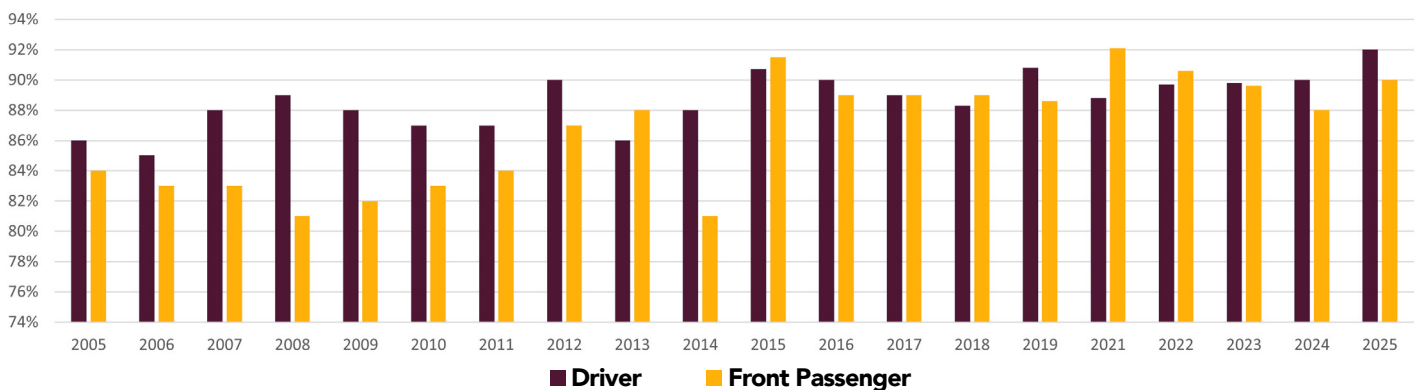
FIGURE 1: OFFICIAL OBSERVED CAR/VAN/SUV SEAT BELT USE, NEW MEXICO, 2005-2025



Source: 2025 Annual New Mexico Official Seat Belt Observation Survey; percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

Pickup Driver seat belt use measured in June 2025 was recorded at 92.2% compared to Car/SUV/Van Driver use of 94.4%, and this difference is statistically significant (at $p = .05$). Pickup Truck Passenger use (89.9%) was also significantly different than non-Pickup Truck Passenger use (95.5%). Figure 2 shows fluctuations in Pickup Truck Driver belt use (with figures rounded to the nearest whole percent). Usage reached an initial high point of 91% in 2015 followed by a decreasing trend since (90% in 2016, 89% in 2017 and 88% in 2018) but went back up to 91% in 2019. However, it decreased in 2021 (89%), and had a slight increase to 90% in 2022, where it remained until the 2025 measure of 92%, which represents the highest level for Pickup Drivers measured to date. Pickup Truck Passenger seat belt use shows a more continuous rising trend from 2008 through 2013, with a steep drop in 2014 but a recovery and increase to 92% belt use for 2015. In the years following, Pickup Truck Passenger belt use remained stable at 89% until it peaked in 2021 (92%). The Passenger rate steadily fell back to 91% in 2022, 90% for 2023, and 88% for 2024, but increased back to 90% for 2025.

FIGURE 2: OFFICIAL OBSERVED PICKUP TRUCK SEAT BELT USE, NEW MEXICO, 2005-2025



Source: 2025 Annual New Mexico Official Seat Belt Observation Survey; percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

Road class differences in observed seat belt use were also explored. During the 2025 New Mexico Occupant Seat Belt Observation June measure, 3,613 occupants were observed on Primary Roads, 1,777 were observed on Secondary Roads, and 752 occupants were on Local Roads. Most occupants fell into the Car/Van/SUV categories (4,341) and 1,801 Pickup Trucks occupants were observed. Table 3 provides the occupant counts observed by road classification and vehicle type. Figure 3 illustrates observed seat belt use for Car/Van/SUV belt use and Pickup Truck belt use on the three road classifications.

FIGURE 3: SEAT BELT USE COMPARISON BY ROAD CLASSIFICATION, NEW MEXICO, 2025

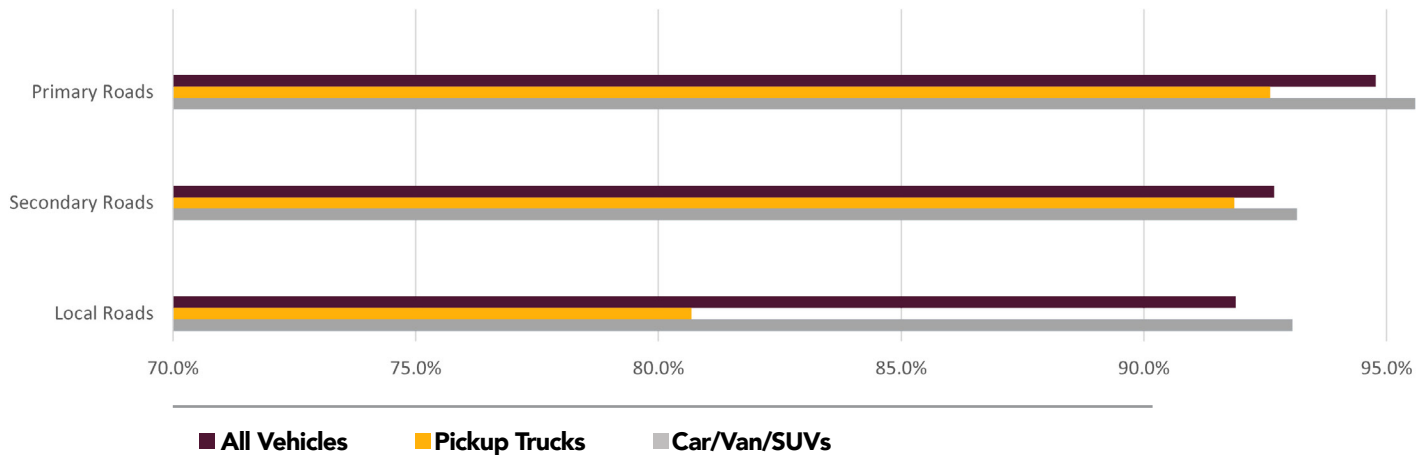


TABLE 3: SURVEYS BY ROAD CLASSIFICATION AND VEHICLE TYPE, NEW MEXICO, 2025

Road Classification	Car/Van/SUVs		Pickup Trucks		All Vehicles	
	# People Observed	Belt Use	# People Observed	Belt Use	# People Observed	Belt Use
Primary Roads	2,627	95.6%	986	92.6%	3,613	94.8%
Secondary Roads	1,138	93.1%	639	91.9%	1,777	92.7%
Local Roads	576	93.1%	176	80.7%	752	91.9%
Statewide Total	4,341	96.1%	1,801	83.7%	6,142	92.4%

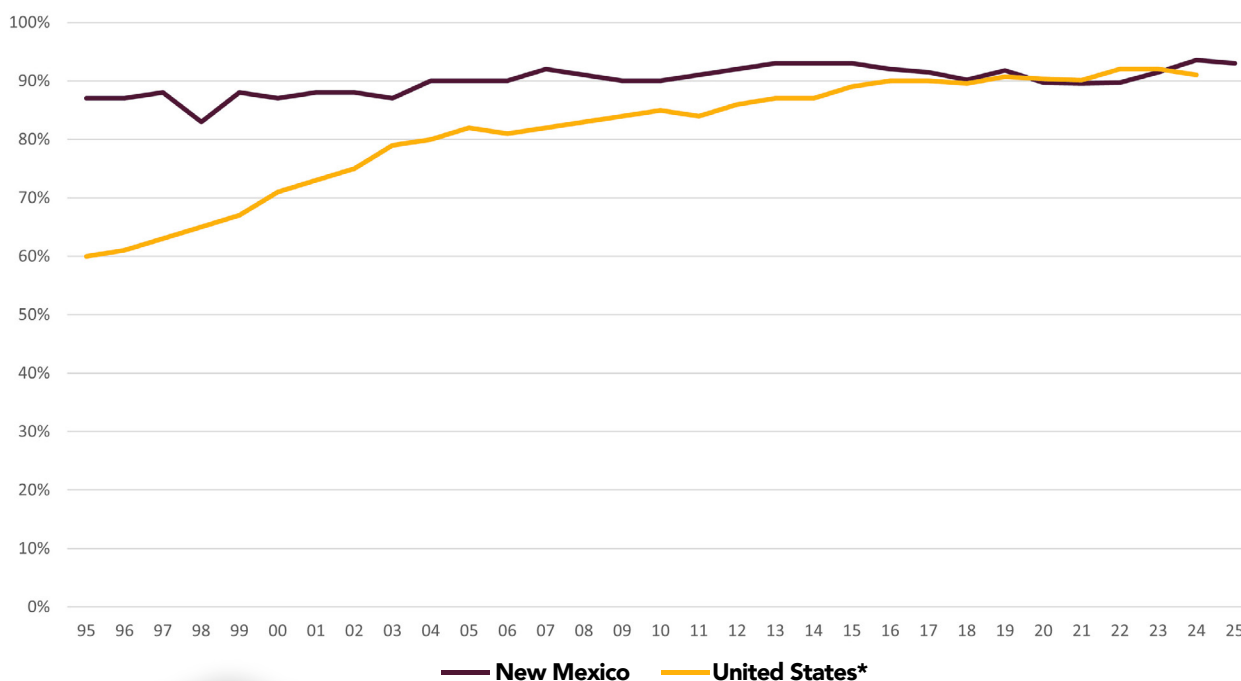
Combining across vehicle types, the lowest percentage of seat belt usage (post) was observed on Local Roads at 91.9% compared to 92.7% for Secondary Roads and 94.8% for Primary Roads. The difference in seat belt use between Primary and Local Roads was significant, as was the case between Primary and Secondary Roads, but the difference in usage between Secondary and Local Road use was not significant. The lowest belt use rate overall was in Pickup Truck occupants on Local Roads, at 80.7%. Pickup Truck belt use peaked at 92.6% on Primary Roads, followed by Secondary Roads at 91.9%, indicating significant differences in Pickup Truck belt use between both Primary versus Local Roads, and Secondary versus Local Roads. Car/Van/SUV use followed a similar pattern with the highest use found on Primary Roads (95.6%), followed by Secondary Roads and Local Roads (both at 93.1%). The difference in Car/Van/SUV belt use was significant between both Primary versus Secondary, and Primary versus Local.

Discussion

Daytime seat belt use in New Mexico in June decreased from the previous year's all-time high usage rate (93.6%) to 92.6%, but the difference is not significant (at $p = .05$). Usage also decreased pre-to-post in 2025 (93.5% to 92.6%), but also non-significantly. Recent overall annual increases observed in daytime use (pre and post) could indicate that some of the declines in usage observed during and after the negative impacting elements of 2020 (civil unrest and COVID-19) have been left behind and usage has increased to (and remained at) all time high levels.

Most categories showed small decreases in raw belt use from the pre-to-post surveys. Primary Road occupants have consistently high belt use rates but yielded a slight, non-significant decrease from pre (95.0%) to post (94.8%). Secondary Road occupant usage also had a non-significant decrease (93.9% to 92.7%); however, Local Road usage saw a non-significant increase (87.7% to 91.9%). Drivers, overall, saw no change in usage pre-to-post (93.7%) and overall Passenger usage saw only a slight drop in usage (94.2% to 94.1%). There were no significant changes pre-to-post with respect to vehicle type, either. Pickup Truck seat belt use decreased (from 92.6% to 91.9%), though Car/Van/SUV category seat belt use showed a slight increase (94.3% and 94.6%). Daytime usage remains at its highest levels, although certain subgroups (i.e., Local Roads, Pickup Truck occupants) with substantially lower use rates should still be targets for future programmatic and campaign efforts.

FIGURE 4: OFFICIAL OBSERVED SEAT BELT USE – NEW MEXICO VS. U.S. 1995-2025 (WEIGHTED)





NIGHTTIME

2025 New Mexico Occupant Seat Belt Observation Study (Nighttime)

Study Purpose

This portion of the study provides a statewide estimate of seat belt use for night drivers and front seat passengers. This is the 10th year for nighttime seat belt data collection. Safer New Mexico Now and Preusser Research Group observers partnered to conduct the nighttime survey for adults in front seat outboard positions using night vision equipment when needed.

Study Design Overview

This study replicates the method used in the 2015-2024 studies. Data collection was conducted by trained Preusser Research Group nighttime observers partnering with trained Safer New Mexico Now daytime observers, who all had participated in previous seat belt surveys. Data were entered and analyzed by Preusser Research Group.

Just as with the daytime seat belt survey, all passenger vehicles (cars, pickups, vans, and SUVs) with a gross vehicle weight up to 10,000 pounds were observed in the survey. This included small commercial vehicles. The target population was all drivers and right front seat passengers (excluding middle passengers and children harnessed in child safety seats) of vehicles traveling on public roads at night, with observers assessing belt use between the hours of 9 p.m. and 2 a.m. The observation period for each selected road segment was 45 minutes. The road segments vary in length permitting the observer to adjust for vantage point in case of unsafe conditions and/or lighting conditions at the usual observation location.

Sampling

The 10th New Mexico Nighttime Occupant Seat Belt Observation Study occurred in 2025. This study provides a statewide estimate of seat belt use for night drivers and front seat passengers using the same 94 sites examined as part of the NHTSA-approved sampling design for daytime belt use in 2013. This allows us to better gauge change over time at night. Since the method of site selection was the same for the 2013 daytime sites, the 2018 daytime sites, and the 2023 daytime sites, we can still reasonably compare day to night use even though the daytime sites changed in 2023.

To recap the sampling methodology used when the night sites were initially selected in 2013, seven counties were involved in the nighttime survey (Bernalillo, Doña Ana, McKinley, Otero, San Juan, Sandoval, and Santa Fe). From these counties, 34 sites were selected (on a prior basis) using the number of daytime observations to weight selection toward higher volume sites (a process fundamentally similar to that used to select daytime sites from the universe of roadways).

Observer Selection, Training, and On-site Procedures

The on-site procedures used for nighttime observations were very similar to the daytime procedures with a few modifications. Observations at night were always conducted by a two-person team. Preusser Research Group personnel with previous night observation experience were paired with an accompanying team member from Safer New Mexico Now with primary experience in daytime observations and some nighttime experience. Attempts were made to conduct night observations in locations with adequate overhead lighting when possible. Observers only used night vision equipment when roadway lighting was insufficient to make observations. The near-military grade equipment (night vision goggles and infrared spotlights not visible to the naked eye) provided visibility in both dark and less dark conditions. This made vehicle occupants visible for belt observations even in total darkness. Local enforcement agencies were made aware of survey operations.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection for the 2025 nighttime survey was conducted from July 25-30, 2025. One person on the team served as the observer and would do the actual observation while the second team member served as a recorder who wrote down the information verbalized by the observer. Six observers gathered observation data over the 2025 study period with 1,131 vehicles observed, and belt use notated for 1,426 occupants (see Table 4). The data sheet used for nighttime observations is included in Appendix III.

TABLE 4: VEHICLES AND OCCUPANTS OBSERVED IN OFFICIAL NIGHTTIME SEAT BELT SURVEYS, NEW MEXICO, 2015-2025

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Number of Observers	7	6	5	6	6
Total Vehicles Observed	1,142	1,588	1,452	1,261	1,340
Total Occupants Observed	1,505	2,174	1,990	1,735	1,840

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Number of Observers	6	5	7	6	6
Total Vehicles Observed	1,171	1,194	1,135	1,217	1,131
Total Occupants Observed	1,563	1,558	1,444	1,589	1,426

Data collected by the observers in the field were examined for completeness and checked for accuracy prior to submission. Completed observation data forms were sent to Preusser Research Group for data entry using Excel and/or SPSS. Data cleaning procedures were performed including 10% entry checks to assess entry accuracy across all data entry forms completed, and variable frequency counts to identify ineligible entry values or outliers. Weighting procedures were not required for the nighttime observation data analysis.

Results

Table 5 shows the number of occupants and nighttime seat belt use by vehicle type.

TABLE 5: SEAT BELT USAGE FROM NEW MEXICO 2025 NIGHTTIME OCCUPANT SEAT BELT OBSERVATION STUDY

Type of Vehicle	Number of Occupants Observed	Number of Seat Belt Users	Seat Belt Use (Percent)
Car/Van/SUVs (all)	1,150	1,012	88.3%
Driver	899	779	86.7%
Passenger	251	233	92.8%
Pickup Trucks (all)	276	228	82.6%
Driver	232	189	81.5%
Passenger	44	39	88.6%
All Vehicles (all)	1,426	1,240	87.0%
Driver	1,131	968	85.6%
Passenger	295	272	92.2%

Shoulder belt use status was observed and recorded on 1,426 front seat occupants, including 1,131 drivers and 295 passengers. Drivers accounted for 79.3% of occupants observed and passengers accounted for 21.7%. New Mexico nighttime drivers and front outboard passengers had a combined unweighted seat belt use of 87.0%, up 0.3 percentage points from the 2024 rate (86.7%). Driver usage in 2025 was recorded at 85.6% and front seat outboard passenger usage at 92.2%.

Shoulder belt use status in Cars/Van/SUV categories were observed and recorded on 1,150 front seat occupants, including 899 drivers and 251 passengers. Drivers accounted for 78.2% of occupants observed in those vehicle types. Nighttime drivers and front outboard passengers in these vehicle categories had a combined seat belt use of 88.0%. Driver usage was recorded at 86.7% and front seat outboard passenger usage at 92.8%.

Pickup driver nighttime seat belt use for Drivers and front outboard Passengers combined was 82.6%. Pickup Truck Driver use was recorded at 81.5% and front passenger seat belt use was recorded at 88.6%. The difference between observed truck occupant seat belt use (88.0%) and Car/Van/SUV occupant seat belt use (82.6%) at night is statistically significant.

During the 2025 nighttime survey period, 869 occupants were observed on Primary Roads, 251 occupants were observed on Secondary Roads, and 306 occupants were observed on Local Roads. Table 6 illustrates observed seat belt use for Car/Van/SUV belt use and Pickup Truck belt use on the three road classifications. Local Roads had the lowest percentage of observed seat belt usage, regardless of vehicle type with an overall use rate of 81.0%.

TABLE 6: NIGHTTIME SURVEYS BY ROAD CLASSIFICATION AND VEHICLE TYPE, NEW MEXICO, 2025

Road Classification	Car/Van/SUVs		Pickup Trucks		All Vehicles	
	# People Observed	Belt Use	# People Observed	Belt Use	# People Observed	Belt Use
Primary Roads	697	89.5%	172	84.3%	869	88.5%
Secondary Roads	192	90.6%	59	83.1%	251	88.8%
Local Roads	261	82.0%	45	75.6%	306	81.0%
Statewide Total	1,150	88.0%	276	84.3%	1,589	87.0%

As illustrated in Table 6, in 2025, Secondary Roads had the highest nighttime seat belt usage at 88.8%, followed closely by Primary Roads at 88.5%. The lowest percentage of seat belt usage was observed on Local Roads at 81.0%. The percentage difference in seat belt use between Primary and Secondary Roads was not significant. Belt use on Local Roads was significantly lower than usage on both Secondary and Primary Roads. Belt use by Car/Van/SUV occupants showed the highest use rate among Secondary Roads (90.6%) followed by Primary Roads (89.5%) and Local Roads (82.0%). Belt use in Pickup Trucks was highest on Primary Roads (84.3%), followed by Secondary Roads (83.1%), and lowest on Local Roads (75.6%), but note that the sample size of Pickup Truck occupants at night was considerably low (276), so the differences are not significant.



NEW MEXICO OCCUPANT SEAT BELT OBSERVATION STUDY

Discussion

A 2-percentage point reduction in use from 2017-2018 was followed by a 1.5-point increase from 2018-2019. Despite the fact that the 2019 rate was higher than in 2018, the rates were still below the highest recorded (89.4%) in 2016. The use rate further decreased in 2021 to 86.0%. In 2022, the rate fell further to 85.3%. For 2023, nighttime belt use rate rebounded somewhat (by 0.6 percentage points) to 85.9%, increased again in 2024 (0.8 percentage points) to 86.7%, and increased 0.3 percentage points in 2025 to 87.0%. As with daytime belt use, occupants in Pickup Trucks and occupants travelling on Local Roads demonstrate lower nighttime belt use. These should be considered important populations to target.





Daytime seat belt study video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-1SJs8anNc>

Recommendations

Daytime seat belt use in New Mexico decreased from the all-time high usage rate of 93.6% in June 2024 to 92.6% in June 2025. This marks the first decrease after three rate increases in a row. Prior to that initial recent increase (in 2022), the 2019 rate (91.8%) was the first annual increase in several years. The 2020 rate (89.7%) continued a downward trend that existed aside from the 2019 rate. That is, the increase in 2019 may have been a chance occurrence. It may also be the case that the global pandemic played a role in the recent (2020-2022) decreases. This impact may have been due to the increase (at least anecdotally) of higher risk drivers making up a higher percentage of the total drivers or even by lower levels of law enforcement efforts (noting that this may be exacerbated by the events of 2020 condemning law enforcement).

Even though the overall usage rate is close to its highest levels, there is still room for improvement. The low usage groups remain low, and given the prior downward trends, the state should expand focus on enforcement during CIOT in future years to further increase seat belt use.

There are many factors that can impact use rates like, type or intensity of media or seat belt enforcement. High visibility enforcement in particular is generally considered to be the best means for achieving increases in belt use. Enforcement rates were declining in much of the country headed into 2019 and the events of 2020 and 2021 may have strengthened that decline. Even though rates indicate usage is trending upward from recent years, the state should maintain focus on and possibly increase enforcement at both daytime and nighttime to further increase belt usage, especially among the lower usage groups.

As with previous years, there are areas deserving of extra efforts to continue to make New Mexico roads safer. Occupants in Pickup Trucks and occupants travelling on Local Roads continue to have the lowest daytime seat belt use rates. In addition, findings from the nighttime study also continue to show lower seat belt use for these same subgroups of vehicles and road types.

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bklup NEW MEXICO OCCUPANT SEAT BELT OBSERVATION STUDY

Report Prepared By

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New Mexico Department of Transportation
Content design and edited by Safer New Mexico Now

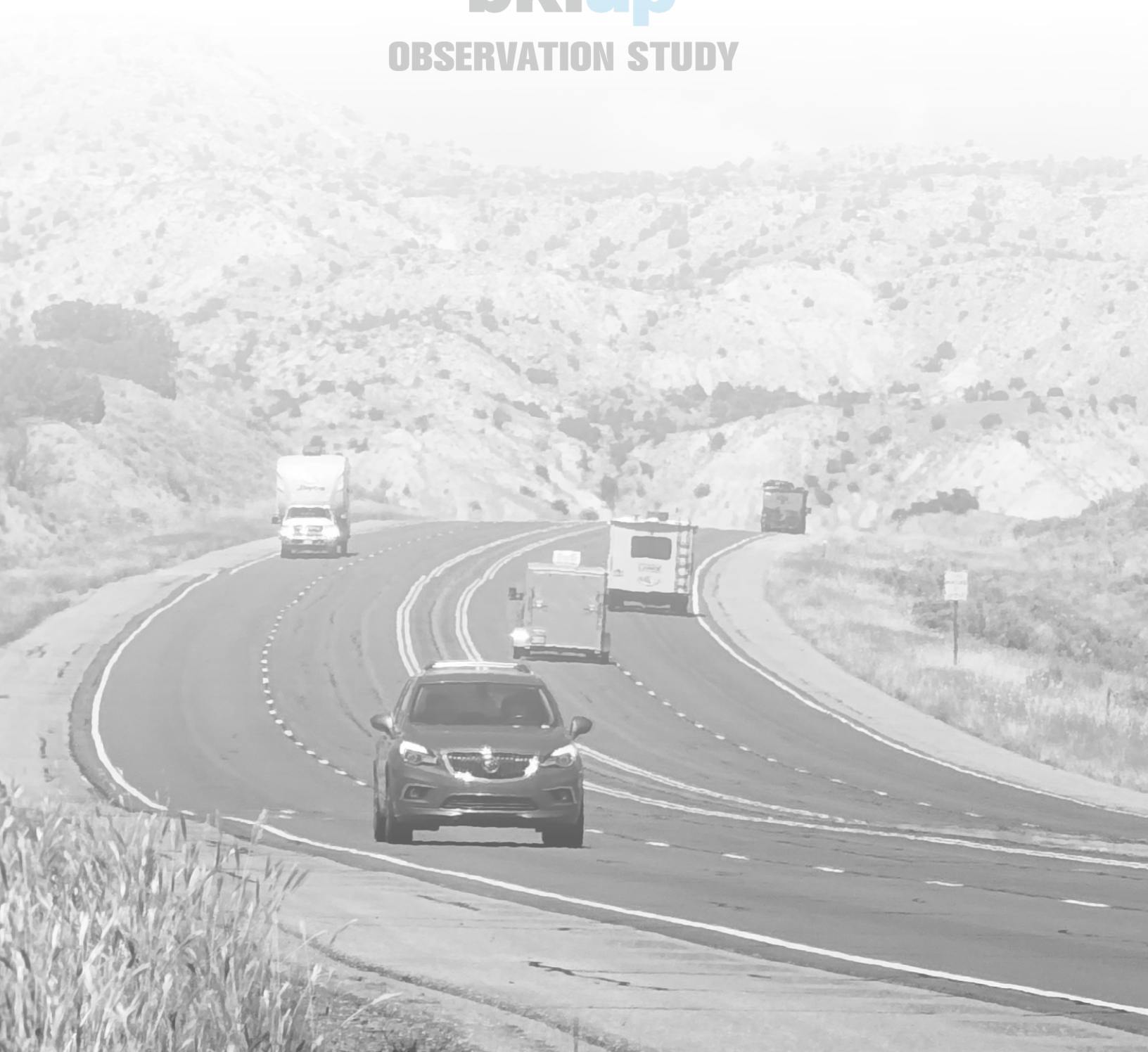
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Safer New Mexico Now Team
Photos included herein are of actual Safer events.

NEW MEXICO
OCCUPANT SEAT BELT

— **bklup** —
OBSERVATION STUDY



APPENDIX I: WEIGHTING AND CALCULATIONS

The following were taken from the New Mexico report 2014 (CITE).

A.0 Imputation, Estimation and Variance Estimation

A.1 Imputation

No imputation will be done on missing data.

A.2 Sampling Weights

The following is a summary of the notation used in this section.

- h – Subscript for road segment strata
- i – Subscript for road segment
- j – Subscript for time segment
- k – Subscript for road direction
- l – Subscript for lane
- m – Subscript for vehicle
- n – Subscript for front-seat occupant

Under this stratified multistage sample design, the inclusion probability for each observed vehicle is the product of selection probabilities at all stages: π_{hi} for road segment, $\pi_{j|hi}$ for time segment, $\pi_{k|hij}$ for direction, $\pi_{l|hij}$ for lane, and $\pi_{m|hijl}$ for vehicle. So the overall vehicle inclusion probability is:

$$\pi_{hijklm} = \pi_{hi} \pi_{j|hi} \pi_{k|hij} \pi_{l|hij} \pi_{m|hijl}$$

The sampling weight (design weight) for vehicle m is:

$$w_{hijklm} = \pi_{hijklm}$$

A.3 Nonresponse Adjustment

Given the data collection protocol described in this plan, including the provision for the use of alternate observation sites, road segments with non-zero eligible volume, and yet zero observations conducted should be a rare event. Nevertheless, if eligible vehicles passed an eligible site or an alternate eligible site during the observation time but no usable data were collected for some reason, then this site will be considered as a “nonresponding site.” The weight for a nonresponding site will be distributed over other sites in the same road type.

Let:

$$whi = \pi hi$$

be the road segment weight. The nonresponding site nonresponse adjustment factor:

$$fh = \sum_{\text{responding } i} whi$$

will be multiplied to all weights of non-missing road segments in the same road type of the same county and the missing road segments will be dropped from the analysis file. However, if there were no vehicles passing the site during the selected observation time (20 minutes) then this is simply an empty block at this site and this site will not be considered as a nonresponding site, and will not require nonresponse adjustment. In the event that the number of “unknown” seat belt use values exceeds ten percent of the total number of use data collected, observers will be sent to the sites with the largest proportions of unknown (i.e. nonresponse) values. Additional observations will be made, on the same day of the week and at the time of day as the original observations, until the total nonresponse rate is ten percent or less.

A.4 Estimators

Seat Belt Use Rate Estimators

Noting that all front-seat occupants were observed, let the driver/passenger seat belt use status be:

$$yhijklm = \begin{cases} 0 \\ \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

The seat belt use rate estimator is a ratio estimator:

$$\rho = \frac{\sum_{\text{all } hijklmn} whijklm}{\sum_{\text{all } hijklmn} whijklm}$$

This estimator captures traffic volume and vehicle miles traveled through design weights (which will include nonresponse adjustment factors as described in section 5.3, if any) at various stages and it does not require knowledge of VMT/DVMT.

A.5 Variance Estimation

The Survey means procedure available in SAS is well suited to provide the variance for this sample design. The procedure provides options to accommodate a clustered, PPS sample with different weights based on the proportion of road segments from the different MTFCC classes.

APPENDIX II: DAYTIME SEAT BELT SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Official Seat Belt Observation Form 2025

Date of Observation: / / 2025	Day of Week: _____
Time: Start _____ End _____	Observer Name: _____
Site Number: _____ City & County: _____	
Roadway/Street Name _____	Speed Limit: _____

Indicate the number of traffic lanes for each direction of travel by placing an (X) or check mark (✓) in the corresponding lane(s). Draw an arrow in each observed lane to show direction of vehicle travel. Write N, S, E, or W to indicate approximate compass heading. Example: 4-lane roadway, 2 lanes each direction. Both westbound lanes, 1 and 2, were observed.

Mark Diagram Accordingly

EXAMPLE LANE 4 LANE 3 LANE 2 LANE 1 CENTER DIVIDER LANE 1 LANE 2 LANE 3 LANE 4 W → W →	LANE 4 LANE 3 LANE 2 LANE 1 CENTER DIVIDER LANE 1 LANE 2 LANE 3 LANE 4
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Observer's Comments:

DRAW OR INSERT AERIAL VIEW OF OBSERVATION SITE BELOW:

Sheet No. _____ of _____ for Observation Site Number: _____

INSTRUCTIONS: For each observed vehicle, start a new row. Place an X or ✓ in the appropriate column for driver and outboard front passenger (if applicable). Passenger children are to be counted under "YES" if restrained with seat belt, or "NO" if unrestrained.

#	Vehicle Type		Driver Seatbelted			Passenger Seatbelted			#	Vehicle Type		Driver Seatbelted			Passenger Seatbelted		
	C	T	Yes	No	Unk	Yes	No	Unk		C	T	Yes	No	Unk	Yes	No	Unk
1									36								
2									37								
3									38								
4									39								
5									40								
6									41								
7									42								
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31									66								
32									67								
33									68								
34									69								
35									70								
Totals									Totals								

Year _____ Site Number: _____ Sheet No. _____ of _____

APPENDIX III: NIGHTTIME SEAT BELT SURVEY INSTRUMENT

New Mexico Nighttime Seat Belt Observation Data Collection Form

SITE ID NUMBER: _____ CITY: _____ OBSERVER NAME: _____

LOCATION: _____
(Observed Street) (Cross Street or other landmark)

DATE: _____ - _____ - _____ DAY OF WEEK: _____ WEATHER CONDITION (circle one):

1) Clear/Sunny 2) Light Rain 3) Cloudy 4) Fog 5) Clear but wet

TRAFFIC DIRECTION (circle one): N S E W START TIME (Observation period will last exactly 45 minutes): _____ AM or PM (circle one)

DRIVER			PASSENGER		DRIVER			PASSENGER	
Vehicle Type	Sex	Use	Sex	Use	Vehicle Type	Sex	Use	Sex	Use
C = Car T = Pick Up S = SUV V = Van	M = Male F = Female U = Unsure	Y = Yes N = No	M = Male F = Female U = Unsure	Y = Yes N = No U = Unsure	C = Car T = Pick Up S = SUV V = Van	M = Male F = Female U = Unsure	Y = Yes N = No	M = Male F = Female U = Unsure	Y = Yes N = No U = Unsure
1					36				
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25

NEW MEXICO OCCUPANT SEAT BELT OBSERVATION STUDY

DAYTIME / NIGHTTIME SURVEYS

STATE OF NEW MEXICO

Governor: **The Honorable Michelle Lujan Grisham**

NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Cabinet Secretary: **Ricky Serna**

Strategic Infrastructure Development Division Director: **Denise Peralta**

Traffic Safety Division Director: **Shannon Glendenning, AICP**

NMDOT