

ABSTRACT

As with any metropolitan area, the City of Wichita, Kansas experiences a substantial problem with intoxicated drivers and the carnage generated by that activity. A clearly identified problem with a history as long as the automobile itself, alcohol is involved in one-third of all traffic fatalities in Wichita. The specific problem of DUI became the focus of this effort as past programs conducted by the Wichita Police Department and other agencies have appeared to have had only minimal results. Because of the substantial, long term nature of the problem, it became clear that the traditional approaches of enforcement and public-service messages would have to be improved upon.

Until the start of the Wichita Police Department's "F.I.T.(Free Intoxilizer Test) To Drive" program, no interactive methods were available which would educate the younger adults in particular and the drinking public in general, as to the consequences of even the most moderate alcohol consumption on their ability to drive. The lack of a program geared toward the younger drinking public while they were still "out on the town" represented a lost opportunity of an educational nature. The FIT program allowed the police to interact with young adults at special events or clubs where alcohol was being consumed, through the use of an innovative program utilizing free Intoxilizer testing.

The FIT To Drive program utilizes the WPD's BAT (breath alcohol testing) vans which are normally utilized to process patrol's DUI suspects at the scene of the car stop. The vans are staffed by Police Service Officers who are Intoxilizer certified civilian personnel trained in arrest paperwork and prisoner booking. After conducting the breath test and assisting the officers with paperwork, the PSO's transport the arrestees to the

county jail and complete the booking process. The BAT vans have long been popular as a static display at community events. Typically, a van was set up and an operator discussed the equipment in the van and how it is used to assist officers in processing DUI's. There was usually a question and answer session at these displays, allowing a free exchange of information between the police and the community.

It became apparent that while this information was valuable to the community, it was not reaching the group most frequently stopped by officers involved in DUI enforcement. It was determined that the vans would be better utilized as an educational tool if a way could be found to reach young adults at drinking establishments or in attendance at special events which serve alcohol. If the young adults could take a breath alcohol test sometime in the earlier part of their revelries at no jeopardy to themselves, it was believed that it would give them a reference point from which to judge their level of intoxication. In doing so it was hoped they could be better able to judge their level of intoxication and moderate their alcohol intake accordingly.

SCANNING

The nature of the problem, drunk drivers, was, of course, very easy to identify. The Wichita Police Department, on average, arrests 3,000 drunk drivers per year. For the last five years, drinking drivers were involved in 32 of the 99 traffic fatalities. Although drunk drivers are prevalent in all American cities and are responsible for thousands of accidental deaths annually and cost society collectively millions of dollars, it was clear that although this was not a problem unique to Wichita, what was required was an alternative approach

to the concept of public education that was especially geared to the most common offender-the young adult population.

ANALYSIS

Analysis of DUI arrest records in Wichita reflected that the average age for a suspect to be above the 21-23 year age range. With that, the general focus of the FIT To Drive Program was on the 21-23 year age range in order to provide the potential interdiction effect to educate members of the younger age group in order to prevent as many DUI arrests in the future as possible.

Prior to the development of the FIT program, efforts to control the problem of drunk drivers consisted of traditional enforcement methods, i.e., arrests, and the educational programs consisted of printed or visual media that spelled out the problems associated with drunk driving, or at best, provided charts reflecting how many drinks would produce a .08% blood alcohol level for a given body weight. The later handouts and charts, did not allow for additional factors such as individual metabolism, stomach content prior to consuming alcohol, the time it took an individual to consume the alcohol, etc. Given that DUI arrests and fatal accidents involving alcohol had never substantially decreased, it was apparent that the traditional approach of enforcement coupled with public-service announcements and handouts was not an efficient method of crime prevention. Too, the general public has always been supportive of efforts to reduce the problem of DUI reduction.

RESPONSE

The range of potential responses to the problem of DUI were somewhat limited by budgetary restrictions. Increased enforcement represented a prohibitively expensive alternative. The Wichita Police Department is an agency heavily influenced by the community policing philosophy. As such, the internal environment of the Department is exceptionally conducive to the development of alternative strategies to combat even the most traditional of societal problems as exemplified by the development of the FIT program. Potential effectiveness, cost and practicality were the evaluation criteria considered to be the most important.

As an evaluation criteria, the potential effectiveness of the FIT program was the primary concern. Never before had a DUI prevention program actually gone into the field to offer free Intoxilizer tests to the drinking public. The FIT program offered a person the opportunity to, for example, take a breath test after consuming two beers on an empty stomach in the span of an hour. The result of the test would provide that person a reasonable gauge as to whether or not their drinking habits while out on the town placed them in danger of being arrested for DUI. As such, it may be reasonably determined that a certain portion of those exposed to the educational nature of the program modified their drinking habits to either consume in moderation or utilize a designated driver. Given the relative newness of the program coupled with its small size as a pilot project, it was never anticipated that FIT To Drive would produce a near-term reduction in DUI-related arrests or accidents.

Another criteria, economy of operation, made the program especially attractive. Since on-duty personnel were utilized to visit with the public and conduct the tests, the only expense incurred by the Wichita Police Department was thirty-five cents per test to cover the cost of the disposable mouthpieces. The Intoxilizer machines used for the presentations were converted to bypass the need for simulator solutions and print-out cards. Pencils and keychains printed with "Don't Drink and Drive" messages were donated by the State's Department of Transportation and were given to those who took a breath test. Foam drink holders were donated by the Coleman Corporation (a Wichita-based camping equipment manufacturer) and were given as prizes to those who were able to guess their blood alcohol level within .02% prior to taking the breath test. Radio promotions in advance of the displays and the live television broadcasts (timed to coincide with the 10:00 P.M. news) gave the program positive coverage at no cost to the Wichita Police Department. The additional media exposure also makes for a success for the program. The mere presence of a marked BAT van and a couple of uniformed officers explaining the program to members of the crowd which invariably gathers is sufficient to generate an ample supply of volunteers.

Practicality appeared to be another virtue of the program. As mentioned previously, the program costs only \$35 for every 100 breath tests given. This relatively minor expense was easily absorbed in the operating budget for the BAT vans. The events where the van would appear were readily scheduled well in advance and one aspect, of the practical nature of FIT To Drive is that it can be readily geared toward any target group. Although the general focus of the program for the Wichita Police Department has been younger

adults, other groups can be easily reached by arranging for a van to appear at hispanic celebrations in the city's open air Farm and Art Market, country and western concerts, etc.

One valuable resource outside of the Wichita Police Department has been the DUI Victim Center of Kansas. At virtually all presentations of the FIT program, volunteers from the DUI Victim have been present with a table arranged near the BAT van to pass out related literature and candy. Additionally, the FIT To Drive program was recognized by the DUI Victim Center of Kansas at its annual award presentation for 1997. Here, the FIT program was received the award in the category of "Intervention."

With the evaluation criteria in place, the first FIT presentation was conducted on 9-13-96 at a large country-western bar that draws a crowd with an average age in the 20's. With the support of the bar's management which provided parking space and encouraging announcements from the disc-jockey, 23 breath tests were given in a two hour span, with the average reading being .046%.

The pilot project, though modest in terms of public participation, was a resounding success in terms of its educational value to young adults. Most of the young people who participated in the voluntary testing were amazed how quickly they could become legally impaired, even with only moderate alcohol consumption. Most of the participants complimented the Department for this new approach to DUI education, and appreciated an opportunity to take a breath test and see first-hand what a few drinks could do to their blood alcohol levels in relation to the state's .08% DUI law.

Since the pilot project in 1996, the FIT To Drive presentations have been expanded to appearances at outdoor celebrations such as Oktoberfest, a variety of concerts and

other event that draw large crowds. To date, nearly 600 tests have been given at these events. The overall average reading has been around .075%. This is significant in that the average person being tested is just at the legal limit-useful information to those desiring to know what they need to do to avoid arrest!

Due to the simplicity, economy and effectiveness of the program, very few difficulties were encountered. One difficulty that was quickly avoided was that in those presentations that were offered after 10:00 P.M. it was found that by that time many of the participants had already lost count of their drinks, and the average readings were significantly over the legal limit. Although the participants had great fun (probably in large part to their intoxication), the program offered them no educational value for the most part. In the beginning it was also a practice to give individuals as many tests as they wanted throughout the event. This led to contests among groups of friends to see who could become the drunkest the quickest. This minor problem was quickly remedied by not giving any additional tests to those who had already reached the .08 limit. A number of people who were interviewed several days after the presentation had difficulty in accurately remembering their exact reading. This was remedied by writing the test result on the back of a plastic keychain provided by the Department of Transportation and giving it to the participant.

ASSESSMENT

Although the initial efforts so far with this new approach to a very old problem as been too few to significantly change attitudes through education in the community in a large percent of the population, it has been a very positive start. Those citizens who have taken the voluntary tests have only had the highest praise for the concept. With the acceptance of the program for the participants, the goal for 1998 for the FIT To Drive Program will be to expand it to administer 1,000 tests and expand its focus to other portions of the community in addition to young adults.

At this point, the response has been sufficiently effective that the only foreseeable change will be to increase its size and scope. As the program expands, it will be at that point that it will be practical to review that data pertaining to DUI arrests and accidents related to alcohol to determine the actual overall effectiveness. What will be difficult to measure will be the hundreds of extremely positive contacts between the Wichita Police Department and the citizens of Wichita.

AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION

1. This project was initiated within the Traffic Section of the Wichita Police Department. Traffic consists of 39 Commissioned Officers and 33 civilian employees. The actual presentations of "F.I.T. To Drive" were conducted by a Lieutenant and one officer. Additionally, the Command Staff, including the Chief of Police, were kept abreast of contemporary information regarding the effort and supported the project throughout.

2. All officers within the Wichita Police Department have received 24 hours of Community Policing training. The officers who took part in this project were included in this training and had received the education prior to the initiative. Four hours of this training dealt with "neighborhood problem solving" modeled after the Goldstein approach and SARA model.

3. The lieutenant who spearheaded the project was allowed flexible work hours. The officers who assisted were also allowed some flexibility in work hours. No other incentives were given.

4. Other than utilizing the basic premise of problem oriented policing, no other guidelines or resources were utilized.

5. No problems were experienced with the use of the model itself. Although this project was somewhat nontraditional, the unusually positive community contacts were enjoyed by all of the officers who participated in the project.

6. The minimal expense of the project is absorbed within the Wichita Police Department existing budget.

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