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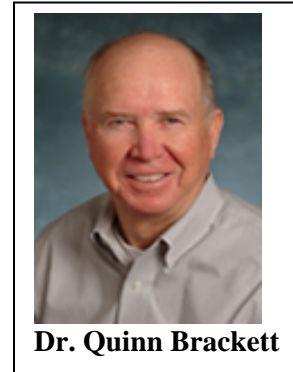
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Dr. Quinn Brackett: Where we go from here

By Rick Davenport

When Quinn Brackett wound up in a transportation safety career in 1973, the study of human behavior behind the wheel was in its infancy. And to make his job harder, the technology available to him and other human factors researchers — by today's standard — was primitive.

"There is no doubt that progress was hindered due to the time it took to complete a project," Brackett, a senior research scientist with the Center for Transportation Safety (CTS), said. "For example, three decades ago, data had to be fed into a machine by hand and the results were hours if not days in the making. Today, it's done for you with one click of a mouse."



When Brackett began his career, just about every aspect of transportation was different. Highways were extremely dangerous, especially if you ran your car off the road. Chances were good that you were not wearing a safety belt. Signs and other fixtures did not break away. If you survived the initial impact, you may have died from injuries you received from the impact inside your car. Steering wheels were not collapsible and the internal components of your vehicle were not designed for safety.

Thankfully, a safety revolution followed. Automobile manufacturers improved both the external and internal designs. Crash cushions and breakaway signs replaced their more dangerous counterparts. Highway designs were improved. Safety belt use became law. The list of improvements is long and the results were reflected in the fatality rates.

In 1973, you were about three times more likely to die from a crash than you are today. For every 100 million miles traveled (VMT) there were about 5 deaths. Today, it's about 1.5 fatalities.

"It's been a phenomenal improvement, thanks to the way we thought about safety," Brackett says. "But we can't lose sight of the fact that about 40,000 people are still dying every year because of crashes."

So, how do we make significant progress from here? Brackett knows it's the biggest challenge yet for researchers. His career has involved research on compliance with safety laws and other human reactions. But, he is now making a major shift. "It's my impression that the greatest strides have already been made. Major changes now will require a change in our culture, a change in our behavior."

Brackett is currently working on an education program aimed at school children from kindergarten through 8th grade. The K-8 Traffic Safety Program is designed to instill a sense of social obligation through questions posed by the teacher.

"For example — during a five-minute break in their regular studies— the teacher could ask the class 'what are the advantages of leaving early for a car trip?' or 'why should you learn what the signs and signals mean?'" explained Brackett. Researchers hope the discussions will change the way pre-drivers think about safety. The program is designed to give them the tools to learn about safe behaviors, years before they get behind the wheel themselves.

"Unfortunately, alcohol and excessive speed account for numerous deaths on our roadways, and people are texting or using cell phones while driving," Brackett said. "Behaviors like these have to change in order for progress to be made. As researchers in human factors, we still have a lot of work to do."

Teens Urged to Buckle Up in New Safety Message

By Rick Davenport

For decades, transportation safety experts have known that using safety belts is the single most important lifesaving activity available for motorists. With programs like the national *Click It or Ticket* (CIOT) campaign, the message has caught on. In most states, especially in Texas, safety belt use is at peak levels. It's one of the reasons cited for the decline in fatalities. But the message is somehow not getting through to our youngest drivers.



Teens have higher fatality and injury rates in motor vehicle crashes than any other age group. "The majority of teenagers killed in crashes were not wearing their safety belt," says Katie Womack, a senior research scientist with the Center for Transportation Safety (CTS) who has conducted safety belt surveys for over 20 years. "Safety belt use rates for teens can be higher in Texas and surrounding states, and that's why this area [Region 6] will be targeted for a safety belt campaign directed at teens."

Planning for the Region 6 Teen Seat Belt Project began in July of 2008, with the first wave of the campaign beginning in May of this year. The Region 6 project will emphasize high-visibility enforcement, messages and materials regarding enforcement of seat belt laws. The campaign activity will complement the CIOT initiative and has been tailored specifically for teens and their families.

The project is modeled after previously successful regional efforts targeting high-risk groups such as pick-up truck owners and motorists in rural areas. Best practices from two successful statewide teen seat belt demonstration projects conducted in Colorado and Nevada in 2007-2008 will also be incorporated in the Region 6 effort.

In Texas, five counties will be the focus of the teen safety-belt campaign: Harris, Dallas Bexar, Tarrant and Hidalgo. Law enforcement agencies within these counties will be recruited to participate in the program. These counties will be the sites for the campaign's enforcement, paid media, earned media and outreach activities. In addition, control areas will be selected for comparison purposes during the project evaluation.

"There has been tremendous success with the overall Click It or Ticket campaign," says Womack. "That's why there is so much enthusiasm for the teen project."

To learn more about the Region 6 Teen Seat Belt Project, visit:

http://www.region6teenbeltproject.org/project_info.html

A New Home for Texas Safe Communities

By Chris Pourteau

You're driving down your neighborhood street, maybe past an elementary school where parents are picking up their kids. You're conscientious and slow down, even beyond the school zone speed limit. And you notice the dangers — children crossing the street between parked cars, several drivers competing for one parking space closer to the front of the school and too few crossing guards to manage the chaos. Shouldn't someone do something about this situation?

Now, maybe you can.

"Safe Communities" is a program that partners grassroots interest with local, state and federal support to help improve transportation-related safety in local areas. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has made a commitment to work with cities and towns through its Safe Communities Service Center, which provides information to Safe Community coalitions around the country.

Armed with tools, strategies and the desire to make a difference, small, medium and large U.S. cities are effecting positive change at the local level. The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) is implementing NHTSA's vision in the Lone Star State, with the assistance of the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) in coordinating existing and new traffic safety coalitions.

"Texas Safe Communities takes the program pioneered by NHTSA and puts it into action in towns as diverse as College Station and Dallas," explains CTS Assistant Research Specialist Irene Rodriguez, who serves as coordinator for the Safe Communities effort in Texas. "Essentially, we serve as an information clearinghouse for advocates who want to make transportation safer in their own little corner of the world."

Rodriguez sees her main role as being an advocate for the advocates — getting the word out to city planners, engineers and concerned citizens who simply need specific information on how to make things happen locally. The new Texas Safe Communities website will be launched in the near future and will serve as a portal for positive change.

The site will consist primarily of resources that local safety proponents can use to plan, develop and implement improvements. Success stories from other communities, news related to Safe Communities issues and instructions for applying directly to TxDOT for funding will also be available.

Set in the context of NHTSA's larger mission, it's easy to see why the efforts of individual champions at the local level are so important. It's one thing to create safety standards and distribute them for implementation and enforcement. It's quite another to make effective change for the better.

"The key to success for this program is the ability of coalitions, partners and agencies to share best practices," explains Chris Willrich, Safe Communities program manager in the Traffic Safety Section at TxDOT. "Active participation and commitment by top community officials and a plan that outlines highway and traffic safety priorities and activities for the community are essential."

Child Passenger Safety Highlighted in Step-By-Step Video



A video which demonstrates the proper use child safety seats and booster seats and provides information on Texas' child passenger safety laws, is now available on the CTS website. The Texas Transportation Institute produced the video for the Texas Department of Transportation. The eight-minute video is designed to help motorists become familiar with child safety seat use guidelines. It also provides information about the agencies to contact for additional information.

[Click here to view video](#)

New Staff



Laura Higgins

Laura Higgins, a 15-year employee with the Texas Transportation Institute, recently joined the Human Factors Group. Her expertise includes interview and survey procedures and driver behavior testing. As an associate research scientist, Laura is currently supervising a study of driver eye movements at intersections, sponsored by the Southwest University Transportation Center (SWUTC). Her previous work has included developing guidelines for the design of transit passenger information services for the development of transit safety and emergency plans, and for regional coordination of transit services. Safety-related research includes an assessment of Texas drivers' perceptions of risk and night-time visibility testing of roadway signs and markings. Higgins also has research experience in transportation planning and air quality. Higgins holds a B.S. in bioengineering and an M.S. in industrial engineering/human factors, both from Texas A&M

University. Laura can be reached at (979) 845-8109 or l-higgins@tamu.edu.

George (Rod) Cavness joined the Center in February as a traffic surveyor. His primary responsibility is conducting field observation surveys of occupant restraint throughout Texas. Rod graduated in 2007 with a B.S. degree in history from Texas A&M University at Corpus Christi. He is originally from Brady, Texas. Rod can be reached at (979) 458-2182 or rod_cavness@yahoo.com.

David Dobrovolsky joined CTS in February as a research associate in the Behavioral Research Group conducting safety-belt traffic surveys. He holds a B.S. degree in business agriculture from Texas A&M University. Before joining CTS, Rod had experience in quality management and safety at Northrop Grumman. David is from Bryan, Texas. David can be reached at (979) 845-2736 or david-d@tamu.edu.