

New Mexico

Best Practices Recognition Form

Part 1 - Project Summary

Project Title: Fatal Crash and BAC Tracking

Project Description (three sentences or less):

New Mexico has an effective system to ensure that all traffic fatalities are captured in the relevant data systems and to maximize the completeness of BAC data in fatal crashes. This is not so much a technological solution, but more a set of relationships among the key organizations.

Nominating Person Contact Information:

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Project Manager Contact Information: (if different from above)

Name:

Title:

Agency and Office

Address with City, State, ZIP:

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Lead Agency for Project:

New Mexico Department of Transportation

Crash Section

Participating/Cooperating Agencies (if any):

New Mexico Department of Public Safety

Law Enforcement Agencies

Office of Medical Investigator, University of NM

Scientific Laboratory Division, New Mexico Department of Health

Which National Agenda goals apply?

#2-Involve the coordination of the collection, management and use of highway safety information among various organizations responsible for highway transportation policy.

Which steps in the management process does the project support?

Identify problems, Evaluate Effectiveness and Implement Programs.

Reference the priority in your traffic records strategic plan to which this project applies:

Strategy of Objective 11.4: Support improvements of the crash data collection system.

Project Cost: planned \$: 0.00 actual \$: 0.00

The system has been built slowly over many years, so there is a zero dollar cost.

Extent of Project Implementation:

The project has been completely implemented.

Summary of Project Benefits: What was improved, who benefited, and how?

This project improves the completeness of traffic fatality and BAC data. This provides several benefits:

1. Enables the reporting of ALL traffic fatalities to FARS and the state crash system.
2. Enables the reporting of complete BAC data on all fatal traffic crashes. If there was a BAC test performed, the results are in the data.
3. Increases the ability to report more completed statistics on traffic fatalities on a monthly basis.

Part Two: Project Detail

Project Description:

New Mexico has an effective system for ensuring that all traffic fatalities are captured, and maximizing the completeness of BAC data in fatal crashes. This is not so much a technological solution, but more a set of relationships among the key organizations. The system has four major components:

1. A tracking system that captures a few key data elements on every possible traffic fatality. This is called the Fatality Log or fatal log for short. Data on all possible fatalities that come to the attention of the Crash Section are entered into the tracking system. This is a very simple database with only one primary data table. Each record is one fatality and has data on whom, where and when. It also captures which police agency is responsible for reporting the crash and whether the crash report has been received.
2. The New Mexico State Police operates a messaging system (still sometimes called the “teletype” system) for communicating law enforcement information. All traffic fatality reports on this system are forwarded to the Crash Section. These early notifications include almost all traffic fatalities in NM and are the main source of data for the tracking system. Newspaper clippings and direct contacts with police agencies supplement these data.
3. New Mexico is one of a small number of states that have a statewide medical investigation system. Ours is called the Office of the Medical Investigator (OMI) and is operated by the Pathology Department at the University of New Mexico. The Crash Section has direct access to OMI’s database, which contains the definitive cause of death and toxicology data for every fatality. These data are used to update the tracking system as they become available. Fatalities that were not in the early notifications received from the State Police messaging system are often found through OMI, and possible fatalities that were ruled to be homicide or suicide are identified and flagged in the tracking system. In addition the OMI investigates most fatalities on tribal land on a consulting basis; these are the fatalities least likely to have been reported through the early notifications.
4. The Scientific Laboratory Division (SLD) of the NM Department of Health provides scientific supervision for BAC testing statewide. All blood tests are done by SLD, and BAC data from breath testing machines statewide are maintained in SLD’s database. SLD provides the BAC’s for surviving drivers in fatal crashes to the Crash Section on a regular basis.

Reports from the tracking system are used to manage the data collection process. If the police report on a fatal crash is not submitted in a timely manner, the agency is contacted. Data from the tracking system are also used for monthly public reporting and some problem identification. These data are more timely than the main crash system, so can be used to track trends.

This system provides very timely data on traffic fatalities in New Mexico, with initial data available within a day or two of the incident for most fatalities. This allows the State to track trends in fatal crashes and respond to developing problems.

Provide the evidence and reasoning used to determine the success of the project:

New Mexico had the highest percentage of reported BAC's in FARS for 2009 in large measure due to the collaboration between the Crash Section and the SLD.

Why should this project be recognized as a best practice in traffic records?

The project has been able to leverage existing assets to improve data quality for a couple of important segments of crash data. This is not a technological solution, but rather the steady building of relationships among the agencies that collect parts of the data.