

BUCKLE UP PHONE DOWN:
JOINING THE
MOVEMENT

Background and Resources for Getting Started



The Missouri Department of Transportation

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WHY BUPD?

There is a public health crisis occurring on America's roadways. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, more than 42,514 people were killed in traffic crashes in 2022. But with most of these crashes being preventable, we know a remedy. The Buckle Up Phone Down movement aims to make this crisis personal, emphasizing the responsibility of each driver to protect themselves and improve the landscape of roadway safety for their loved ones.

BUPD stresses the two most important things drivers can do to move the needle closer to the ultimate goal: zero deaths on our roadways. They're two simple actions with life-saving results.

Buckle Up: Taking a few moments to properly secure yourself and loved ones is the single greatest way to increase your likelihood of surviving a crash. Unfortunately, unbuckled occupants make up a disproportionate amount of roadway fatalities. In 2017 alone, seat belts saved an estimated 14,955 lives and could have saved thousands of additional lives if everyone had been wearing a seat belt.

Phone Down: In the last five years, perhaps no behavior on our roadways has become more alarming than distracted driving. This dangerous activity claimed at least 3,308 lives in 2022 alone. And with a recent AT&T study revealing nearly nine of every ten drivers admits to engaging in their smartphones while driving, roadways across the country have unnecessarily become a dangerous place to be.



GOALS

The BUPD challenge is designed to change the culture of roadway safety and make taking action personal. The ultimate desired result is zero fatalities, but there are goals to achieve on that path.

By increasing the exposure and recognition of the movement, we hope to see an increase in BUPD pledges--individuals and businesses promising to buckle up and put their phone down every trip, every time. We hope this increase in drivers dedicated to roadway safety in turn leads to better seat belt usage rates and fewer distracted driving crashes. Improving performance in these areas will reduce the number of fatalities occurring on America's roadways.



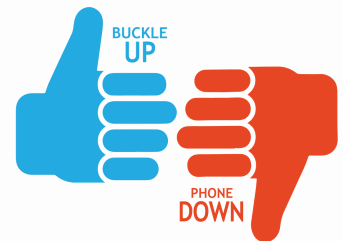
THE HISTORY OF BUPD

With fatalities on the rise, weak state anti-texting laws and no primary seat belt law, the Missouri Department of Transportation knew it had to take a different approach to driver and passenger safety. Focusing on personal responsibility, the department launched its Buckle Up Phone Down safety campaign in the early months of 2017.

Buckling their seat belt and putting down their cellphone are two of the most effective actions an individual can take to stay safe when getting behind the wheel. In an effort to reach both drivers and passengers with these two messages, the BUPD program was born.

Organizers felt that not only would the challenge encourage safer actions, but it would also recruit those participants to help spread the message and encourage others to take a role in their own safety and, ultimately, the safety of others. Originally inspired by the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, which challenged people to dump an ice-cold bucket of water over a person's head to spread awareness of Lou Gehrig's disease, the campaign challenged Missouri businesses to adopt policies supporting seat belts and eliminate cellphone use while in company vehicles. Individuals were encouraged to pledge to fasten their seat belt--whether driver or passenger--and put their cellphone down when driving.

MoDOT put a face to the challenge with the "dueling thumbs" hand gesture--one thumb up for "buckle up," and one thumb down for "put your phone down." With this branding gesture, individuals and groups were asked to take photos of the thumbs up/thumbs down pose and upload them to a special MoDOT website.



Businesses were asked to display their commitment by sharing a logo on the MoDOT website that showed their employees they were committed to their safety. It was also a challenge to other companies to join the movement. A letter was sent out explaining the program to hundreds of Missouri businesses. A ready-to-launch communications campaign was shared to make adoption easy. A challenge was born, and the results were swift.



EXPANDING THE MOVEMENT

The grassroots efforts of dedicated employees and pledges across the state caught on. A mere weeks after the creation of the challenge, hundreds of individuals and businesses had jumped onboard. Corporate safety officers welcomed a chance to share a new safety campaign, and individuals sent their thumbs up/thumbs down photos in droves.

Special promotional displays were set up at the Missouri State Fair so people could take their photos in the familiar pose. And as the movement grew, Missouri's Governor and First Lady became involved with the program. Even Missouri high schools joined in, challenging rival schools and teams to accept the challenge and pass it on.

After that, the push started going beyond Missouri. Members of the Mid America Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials asked for more information on the program, and some states began adopting it to fit their own needs.

A special governor-declared Buckle Up Phone Down Day in October brought businesses together to share the cause. The program was so impactful that in January of 2020 it was awarded the Governor's Quality Award, the highest honor given in Missouri state government.

Today, the BUPD program is poised to go nationwide. With a focus on safety, the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials is promoting the effort and encouraging members to take the challenge.



Kansas City Chiefs mascot KC Wolf shows off his BUPD thumbs outside of Arrowhead Stadium.



A Missouri Chick-fil-A restaurant incorporates BUPD messaging on its 'Cell Phone Challenge' boxes.



University of Missouri mascot Truman the Tiger shows off a BUPD banner on campus for BUPD Day.

BUPD SUCCESSES

The BUPD movement is intended to bring positive change to personal behavior and, ultimately, roadway safety. The successes of the movement are measured twofold: first through vast recognition of the message, and second through clear improvement in driver behavior.

PLEDGES AND EXPOSURE

To get BUPD up and running relied on some level of recognition in the traveling public. To do so took a team of "champions" located across the state, brainstorming and working out ways to get the message through as many avenues as possible. These champions started small, pushing BUPD through their local communities, and they saw enormous success in the challenge's ability to spread.

One way to measure this success in recognition is through BUPD pledges. A key component of the challenge is a driver making a promise. To add a physical element to this promise, drivers can take a pledge to BUPD. To keep the momentum going, those who take the pledge receive a card urging them to encourage others to accept the challenge.

As of June 2024, nearly 55,000 individuals and 756 businesses have taken the BUPD pledge.

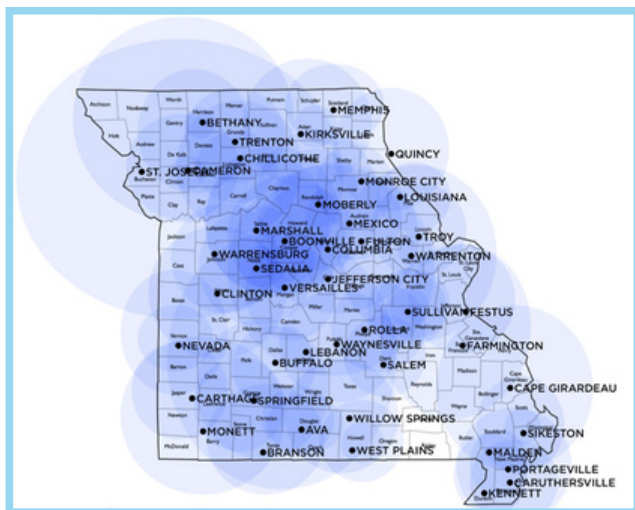
But the movement doesn't rely on word of mouth exclusively for recognition. MoDOT and the Missouri Coalition for Roadway Safety use their various media resources to keep the message alive across the state.

More than 250 dynamic message signs located on heavily-traveled interstates carry BUPD messaging throughout the year. MoDOT and the Coalition's social media pages share the BUPD message frequently to more than 694,000 followers, urging them to take the pledge and pass it on. Advertised BUPD videos and graphics have garnered more than 114 million impressions since 2017.

The work of these BUPD champions, combined with the statewide media pushes, has resulted in massive exposure of the movement, thousands of pledges and valuable recognition.



A BUPD banner collects signatures of high school students promising to buckle up every trip and put the phone down before driving.



A heat map of BUPD messaging exposure via traditional radio from April 20-26, 2020. (Courtesy of MissouriNet)



Crash survivor Jaylen Butner opens the BUPD "Pass It On" PSA, featuring professional sports mascots from across Missouri and the state's governor.

DRIVER BEHAVIOR

The largest, most important success of the BUPD movement is the positive change in driver behavior. An increase in seat belt usage and a decrease in distracted driving help prevent crashes and protect travelers, the purpose that drives BUPD.

Part of the BUPD challenge to businesses is to enact a policy addressing seat belts, cellphone use in vehicles, or (ideally) both. In a 2020 survey to BUPD pledges, 397 businesses reported having a seat belt policy in place, and 120 reported implementing or strengthening their policy because of the BUPD challenge. Likewise, 303 businesses reported having a cellphone policy in place, and 110 reported implementing or strengthening their policy because of the BUPD challenge.



A Missouri Wendy's restaurant displays BUPD messaging.

Aside from enacting policy change for thousands of employees across the state, the BUPD challenge has driven improved results in Missouri seat belt use. In 2023, Missouri's annual seat belt survey reported 87% of Missourians use a seat belt. This is significantly higher than the usage rate when BUPD first began which was around 81%. In addition, the number of unbelted fatalities in Missouri has decreased each of the last 3 years.

In a 2020 survey, 100% of BUPD pledges reported buckling up on a regular basis, 633 of them because of the BUPD challenge. And despite Missouri having no primary seat belt law, 68 municipalities have passed their own primary seat belt ordinance.

The BUPD movement is also making headway in the fight against distracted driving. In the 2020 survey, 96% of pledges reported either never using a phone while driving, or using hands-free only. And although distracted driving is widely under reported in traffic crashes, Missouri has seen an increase in distracted driving fatalities in recent years. In 2019, the state totaled 71 distracted driving fatalities, and in 2023, that number was 104.



Missouri Governor Mike Parson and First Lady Teresa Parson show off their BUPD thumbs.

In addition, the state of Missouri passed a hands-free distracted driving law in 2023 which prohibits the handheld use of an electronic device while driving for all drivers.



St. Louis Blues mascot Louie shows off his BUPD thumbs outside of the Enterprise Center.



Harrisonville High School students show off their BUPD thumbs as part of their challenge to rival high schools to take the pledge.



JOIN THE MOVEMENT

The key to keeping the momentum of the BUPD challenge alive is getting involved. Anyone is capable of joining the movement and spreading the word, and each pledge is a step toward safer roadways. But there are ways for organizations to launch their own BUPD movement and make significant progress toward this goal:

Adopt or strengthen your own BUPD policy.

Before you spread the message outward, look inward to see where you can easily enact change. Take a look at your organization or business policies. Do you have a clear expectation of seat belt use in company vehicles? Have you banned the use of cellphones in company vehicles? You can easily boost your organization's credibility by adding or strengthening your internal policies to reflect the importance of the BUPD movement. Target your own employees and partners first. *(See a sample BUPD policy from the Missouri Department of Transportation on page 8.)*

Identify your BUPD champions.

The spread of BUPD intensified in Missouri when MoDOT established 'champions' across the state. BUPD champions are those individuals who can dedicate time and resources to the challenge, conceiving effective ways to reach audiences large and small in their communities. These champions share ideas frequently, highlighting successful campaigns and discussing ways to reach specific audiences. *(See a map of Missouri's BUPD champions on page 8.)*

Determine your BUPD brand.

The success of the movement's exposure relies partially on recognition. Recognition is achieved through reinforced, consistent messaging, and the most important message of the BUPD movement lies in the acronym: buckle up, phone down. You have the message, now you need the brand. Does your organization have a specific brand (color scheme, design elements, etc.) that can adopt the message? Do you have a unique design in mind to fit your target audience? Would you prefer to use Missouri's BUPD logo and brand? Discuss within your organization the best branding fit for your BUPD efforts, and stick to it. Reinforce it in your internal and external messaging to increase recognition and exposure and keep the BUPD word moving. *(See a sample BUPD brand from the Missouri Department of Transportation on page 9.)*

Find your target audience.

Once you've reflected on your own policy and established your BUPD brand, it's time to look outward. Who is it you're trying to reach with the BUPD message? Businesses? Partners? Legislators? Customers? Once you know who you want to challenge, you can figure the best methods for reaching this audience. Knowing the demographics of your audience can help you find the best channels to reach them.

These first four steps are key for organizations looking to launch a BUPD movement of their own. But ultimately, it's the collective effort of each individual, each organization, each champion and each campaign that will result in a positive change in driver behavior and safer roadways across the country.

Determine the time frame of your launch.

The BUPD movement is a continual challenge to drivers everywhere, but you'll need to decide the best time to dedicate to your organization's launch. You may start small, using or creating a BUPD Day. In Missouri, a governor-declared BUPD Day is celebrated each October. You might instead choose to devote a week to your launch, using each day to stress important messages of the movement. Or your organization could dedicate BUPD resources to a launch in April, which is National Distracted Driving Awareness Month. However large or small the time frame for your launch, the challenge doesn't stop. Determine the launch that best positions your organization to keep the BUPD message alive.

IT'S YOUR TURN. PASS IT ON.

We've taken the challenge. It's up to all of us to keep it moving.

If you have any questions about getting started, or would like some help implementing BUPD in your business or organization, contact MoDOT's State Highway Safety and Traffic Engineer Jon Nelson at jonathan.nelson@modot.mo.gov. MoDOT is happy to provide a personal contact to assist with any questions you may have.

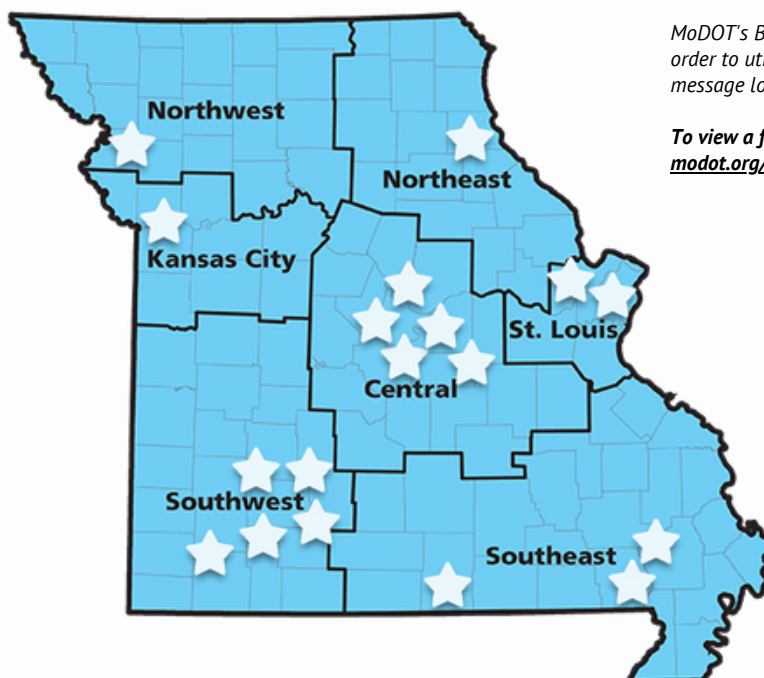
MODOT'S BUPD POLICY

Standard Rules of Conduct

To ensure compliance with this policy, an employee shall not:

- Violate traffic laws or disregard or violate existing safety rules (as defined in MoDOT Safety policies or Procedures or relevant operational and training manuals), which could endanger the health and safety of the employee, a coworker, or the general public. The district safety representative will assist in the interpretation or clarification of matters involving safety policies, rules and regulations. Such violation may include but not be limited to the following:
 - Failure to use department prescribed personal protective equipment when required to do so, including the failure to use seat belts while in a department or personal vehicle when conducting MoDOT business or while operating department equipment.
 - Use of personal or department owned communications equipment, including a cellphone, smartphone, tablet, laptop, or other mobile communication device while operating department owned vehicles/equipment or while operating a personal vehicle for official department business.

MODOT'S BUPD CHAMPIONS

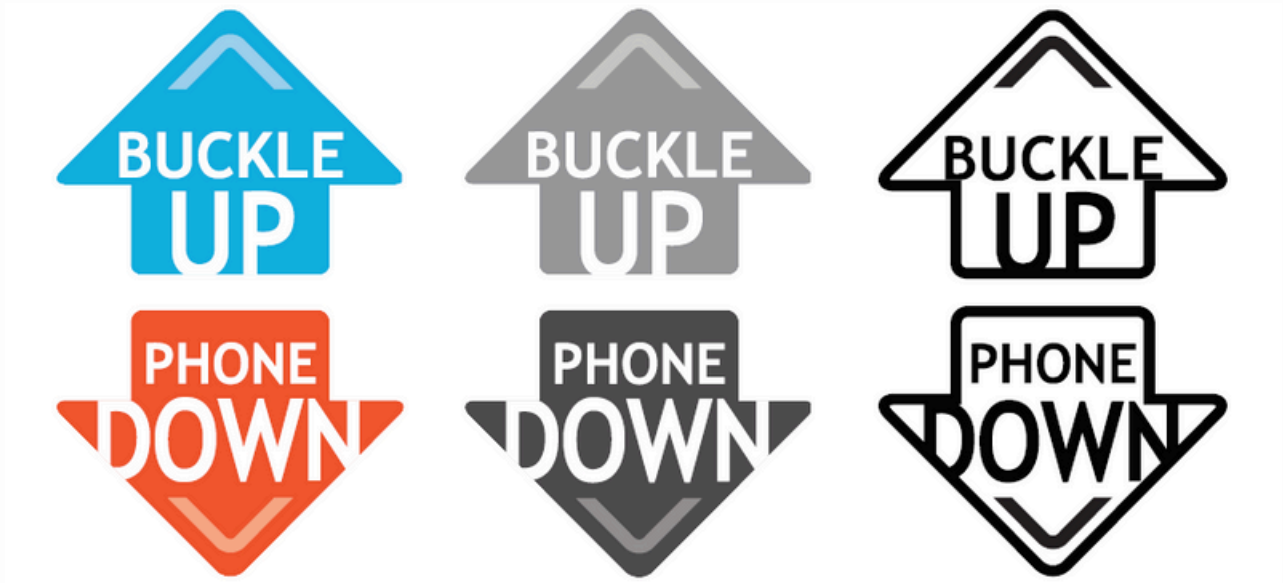


MoDOT's BUPD champions are located throughout the state in order to utilize different methods for spreading the BUPD message locally.

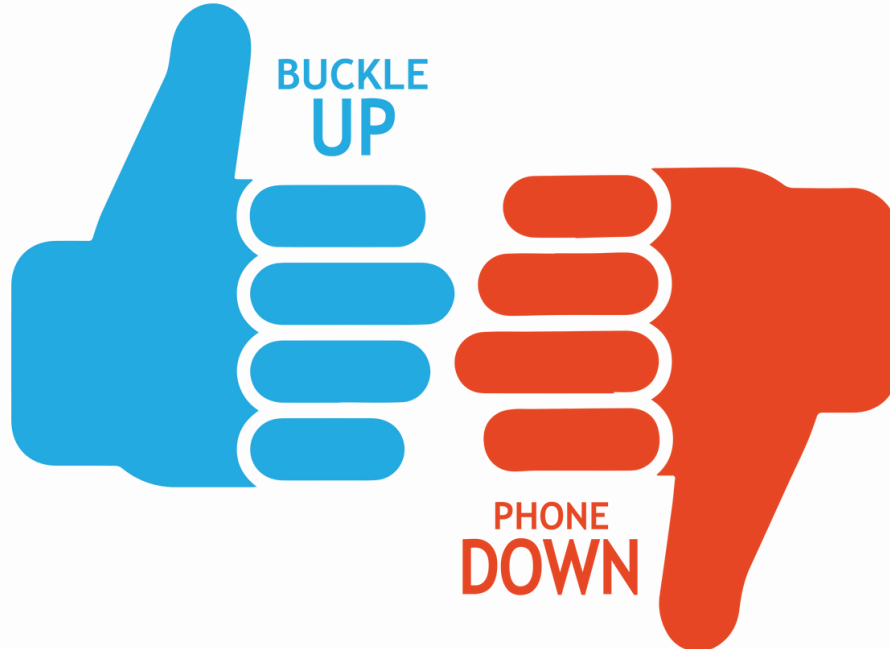
To view a full list of MoDOT's BUPD champions, visit modot.org/bupd-starter-kit.



MODOT'S BUPD BRAND



BUCKLEUP ⇄ PHONEDOWN



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more sample marketing materials or to download ready-made BUPD logos, visit www.modot.org/bupd-starter-kit or scan the code to the right.

