

Sitka

Transportation Safety Plan



Prepared by:

Sitka Tribe of Alaska



WHPacific

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FIGURE 1: SITKA ROADS: DOWNTOWN

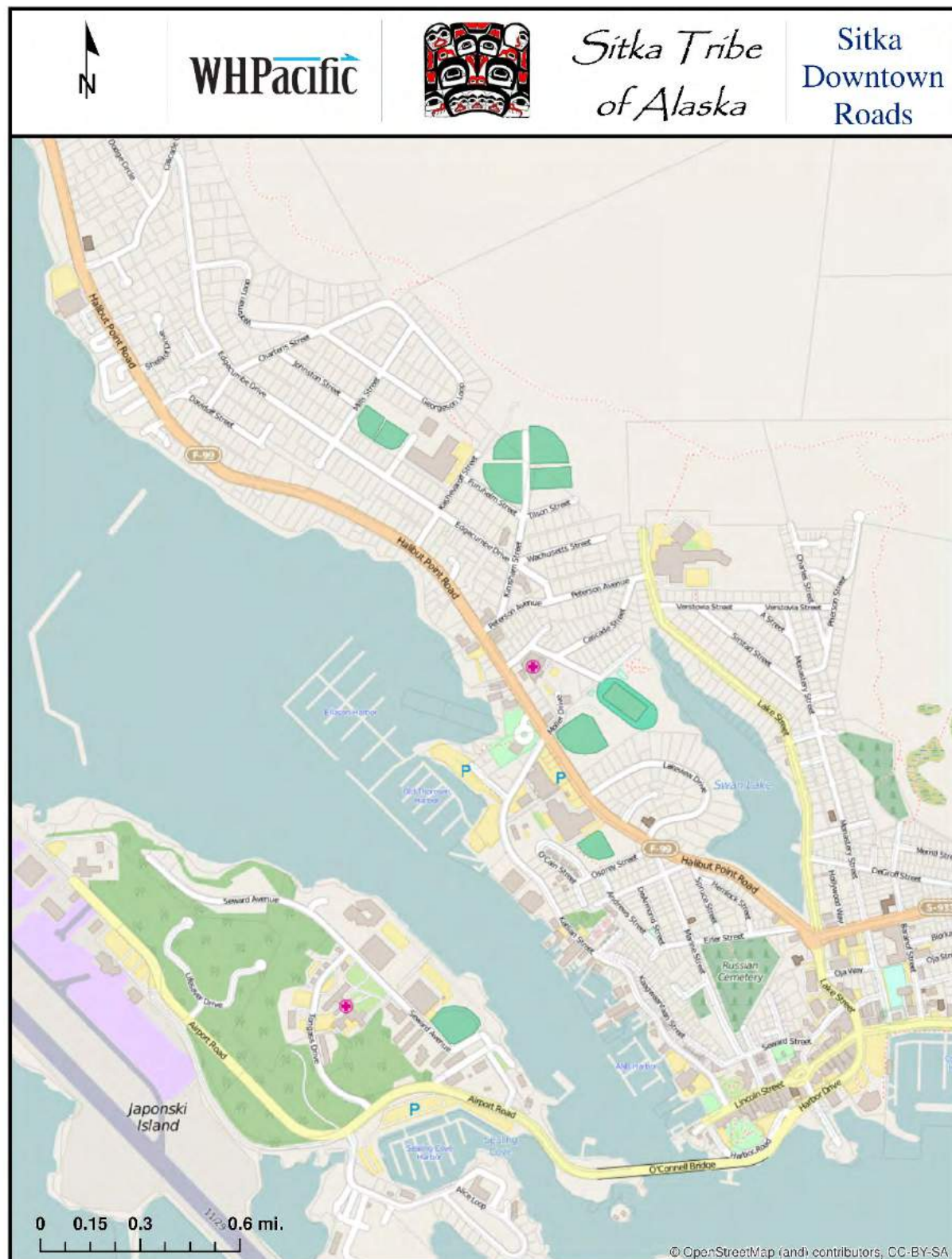
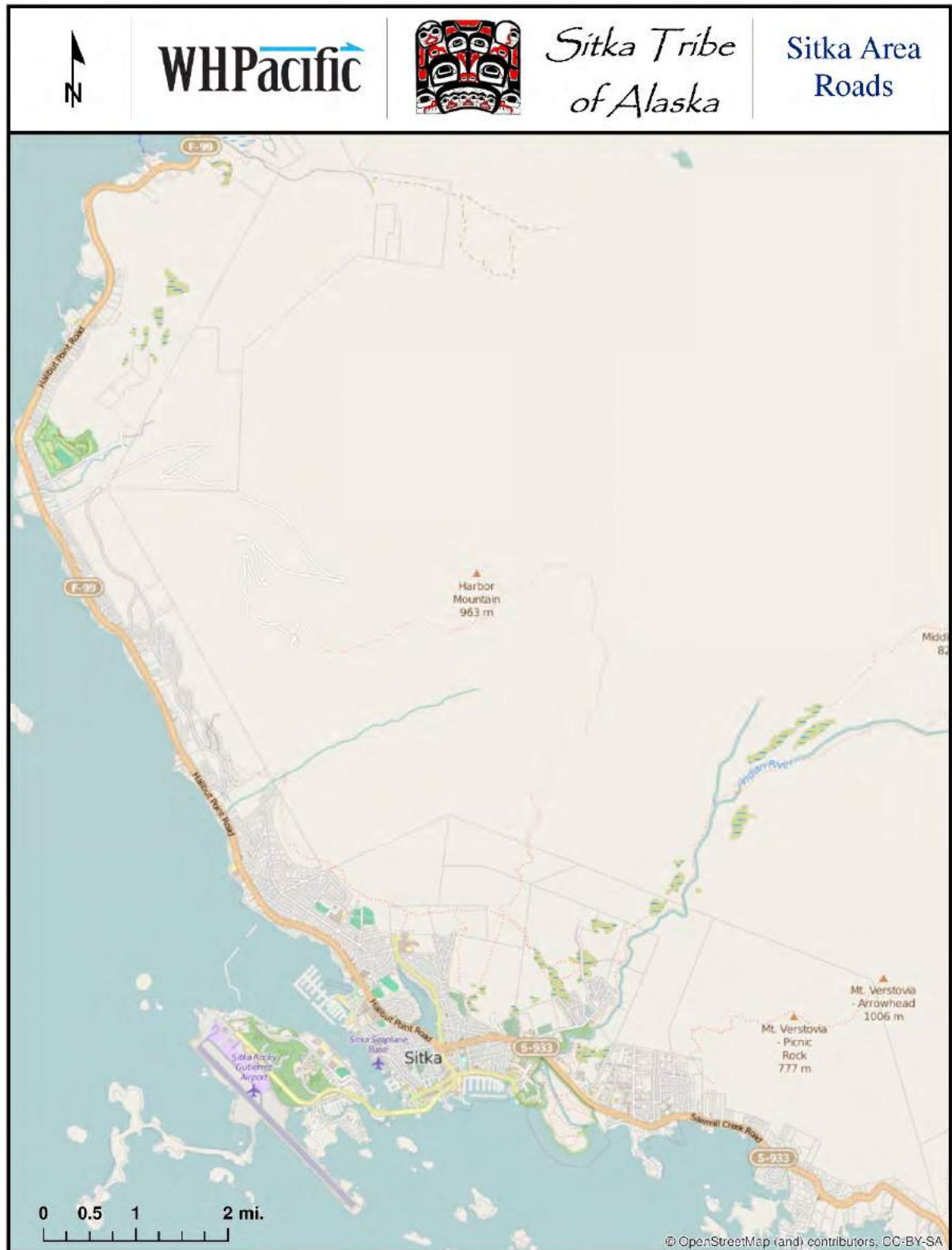


FIGURE 2. SITKA AREA ROADS



I. Introduction

The Sitka Tribe of Alaska (STA) received a 2014 Tribal Transportation Program Safety Planning Grant from the Federal Highways Administration (FHWA) and contracted with WHPacific to assist them with completing the plan. STA collected accident and safety data, distributed, collected and analyzed a transportation safety survey, collaborated with stakeholders, and wrote and revised the plan.

A. Background

Sitka is located on Baranof Island in Southeast Alaska. It is a unified city-borough with a land mass of 2,870 square miles. It lies 95 air miles southwest of Juneau and 591 air miles southeast of Anchorage. The 2010 population for the city and borough was 8,881. The average January low temperature is 36.4°F, and the average July temperature is 57.2°F. Average annual precipitation is 132 inches, with 33 inches of snowfall.^{1 2}

STA represents over 4,000 enrolled tribal citizens of Tlingit, Haida, Aleut and Tsimpsian heritage. It is an Indian Reorganization Act government established in 1934. The STA works to benefit its members by administering Federal social, educational, employment, and economic programs, managing natural resources, providing fixed-route public transit services, and promoting tribal culture. The “Greater Sitka Borough” was incorporated in 1963, and the City and Borough of Sitka was established in 1971 as a unified home rule government.³ The community is served by Shee Atika, Incorporated as the local village corporation, Sealaska Corporation as the regional Native Corporation, and Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska as the regional native non-profit.

The community is not accessible by road; air and marine transportation are the primary means of travel in and out of the community. Sitka’s Rocky Gutierrez Airport has regular jet service to Anchorage and serves as a transportation hub for short flights on smaller aircraft to surrounding areas. The City and Borough of Sitka operates a seaplane base on Sitka Sound, as well as five small boat harbors. Thomsen Harbor is protected by a breakwater. There is deep draft moorage at the privately owned Old Sitka Dock, where cruise ships dock during the summer months. The Alaska Marine Highway ferry docks at a facility



FIGURE 3. SITKA LOCATION MAP

¹ Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development. Community Summaries. Retrieved from: <https://www.commerce.alaska.gov/dcra/DCRAExternal/community/Details/61300339-a614-43fb-a30f-41604e5e0c1c>. August 20, 2015.

² "Sitka, Alaska." Sitka Weather. Graphiq, Inc., 2015. Web. 31 Aug. 2015.

³ "Sitka, Alaska." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, 29 Aug. 2015. Web. 31 Aug. 2015. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sitka,_Alaska#Geography>.

approximately six miles north of town. Travel is primarily by cars, trucks and motorcycles.⁴ The road network in Sitka includes approximately 22 miles of roadway, including 16 miles of paved roadway.⁵

Northern communities such as Sitka enjoy extended daylight hours during the summer, but Alaskan winters are dark and lengthy. In Sitka, light diminishes through the fall to a low of approximately 6.4 hours of daylight at the winter solstice. This can create safety hazards in terms of visibility of pedestrians and wildlife.⁶

B. Mission

The mission of the STA Transportation Safety Plan is to provide safer conditions for motorists, bicyclists, pedestrians and boaters traveling in the vicinity of Sitka.

II. Existing Resources

A. Safety Partners

The following safety partners provided information and valuable assistance in the development of this plan:

- STA – Managed the project, coordinated with safety partners, distributed and collected survey data, interviewed community members, held meetings, reviewed and provided input into the plan.
- City and Borough of Sitka – The Planning Department, Public Works Department, and Sitka Harbor provided information about safety issues.
- Sitka Police Department – Provided information about the department and local safety issues.
- Sitka Fire Department – Provided information about the department and local safety issues.
- Baranof Elementary, Keet Gooshi Heen Elementary, Blatchley Middle School, Sitka High School, Pacific High School, Mount Edgecumbe High School, Sitka Home School/REACH – Provided information about transportation safety efforts at the school and safety concerns for students.
- Southeast Alaska Regional Health Corporation (SEARHC) Injury Prevention Program – Identified safety education and safety resources.
- Southeast Region EMS Council, Inc. (SEREMS) – Provided information about their role with regard to providing training, testing and support for EMS services in Sitka and regionally.
- Alaska State Troopers – Provided information about their responsibilities in Sitka and in regards to transportation safety.

⁴ Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development. Community Summaries.

⁵ CBS Streets Inventory. 24 July 2014.

⁶ "Daylight Hours Explorer." Daylight Hours Explorer. Web. 31 Aug. 2015.

<<http://astro.unl.edu/classaction/animations/coordsmotion/daylighthoursexplorer.html>>.

- Swan Lake Senior Center – Provided information on senior transit and paratransit and perspective on senior transportation safety needs.
- Alaska Marine Safety Educational Association (AMSEA) – Provided information on programming and feedback on transportation safety issues.
- Sitka Bicycle Friendly Community Coalition – Provided information on programming and feedback on transportation safety issues.
- Sitka Community Hospital – Provided information on programming and feedback on transportation safety issues.
- Alaska DOT – Provided information on transportation planning and engineering related to transportation safety in Sitka.
- “the RIDE” – Provided information on programming and feedback on transportation safety issues.
- United States Coast Guard Air Station Sitka – Provided information about programming.
- Swan Lake Senior Center – Provided information on programming and feedback on transportation safety issues.

B. Overview of Existing Efforts

The following organizations and efforts have contributed to improved transportation safety in Sitka:

City and Borough of Sitka Comprehensive Plan Update 2007 – The City and Borough of Sitka developed a Comprehensive Plan update in 2007. The Plan was intended to guide decision making for the community and identify priority projects. The previous comprehensive plan was completed in 1999. An update is planned in 2016.

Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan (SATP) – This plan is prepared by the State of Alaska, and there is currently a 2014 Draft SATP. The plan assesses existing transportation conditions and identifies regional priorities in Southeast Alaska. Among the identified future projects is the construction of a road from Sitka to Warm Spring Bay and a ferry terminal. While construction of this project would be outside of the twenty-year planning period of the SATP in progress, EIS preparation and design would occur within the twenty-year planning period. The project is intended to save time and expense on ferry operation, and would allow the ferry to operate without tidal and current-related constraints.⁷

Southeast Alaska Regional Health Corporation Injury Prevention Program – The SEARHC Injury Prevention Program (IPP) strives to reduce injuries in Sitka and the region by providing safety education and resources. They provide safety equipment at reduced cost such as ATV/snowmachine helmets and goggles, bike helmets, SOS emergency kits, child life vests and float coats.

⁷ "Draft 2014 Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan." State of Alaska Department of Transportation. Web. 31 Aug. 2015. <http://dot.alaska.gov/sereg/projects/satp/assets/SATP_2014_Draft_Final_Web.pdf>.

Southeast Region EMS Council, Inc. (SEREMS) – This organization is a non-profit based in Sitka that provides instruction, testing and support for Emergency Medical Services (EMS) in the Southeast Region. Their staff have emergency medical technician (EMT) training and provide support to communities in case of significant local emergencies where needed. SEREMS staff supported search and rescue efforts relating to the August 2015 landslides in Sitka. SEREMS is a conduit for small grants for supplies, equipment, insurance for emergency response vehicles and training to be transferred to local communities. Typically, Juneau, Ketchikan and Sitka’s needs are not eligible for these funds as their city governments are able to finance most expenditures.

Safe Routes to Schools Master Plan for Sitka Schools 2013 – The community completed a Safe Routes to School Master Plan for Sitka Schools in 2013. Funded by the State of Alaska, the plan reflects stakeholder and public involvement and research on existing conditions that resulted in a collection of recommendations to improve safety in the vicinity of Baranof Elementary, Keet Gooshi Heen Elementary, and Blatchley Middle School. Recommendations included education, engineering, enforcement, encouragement and evaluation. Many of the engineering projects identified in the plan have since been completed.

Sitka Community Hospital – Sitka Community Hospital is pursuing two major efforts: one related to pedestrian and cyclist visibility, and the other related to distracted driving. For the visibility effort, in spring 2015, researchers performed observations on Sitka roads about what kind of apparel cyclists wore, and found very low levels of visibility. After a visibility education effort, researchers will perform observations again and assess progress. Promotional efforts include administration of a visibility campaign called “Be Bright at Night,” raffles, print ads and articles, a movie, flyer, and social media outreach. The project is a partnership between the hospital, the Police and Fire Commission, Wells Fargo and the State of Alaska.



PHOTO 1. BE BRIGHT AT NIGHT PROMOTION
Source: <https://sitkacycling.wordpress.com/>

For the distracted driving portion, the hospital performed observations last spring and found that of 265 drivers, 57 (21%) had one hand off the wheel and the other hand doing something else, such as holding a phone. They are working on education efforts, and plan to create a distracted driving pledge that could be included with the local paper. SEARHC would assist with funding. They created a distracted driving ordinance – 2015 Safe Streets Focused Drivers – modeled after one in Austin, Texas. The ordinance has passed several obstacles and will be before the Assembly shortly. The hospital plans to do a second observation in February.

Alaska State Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) – The SHSP outlines a statewide strategy to improve roadway safety. The plan uses “five Es” of safety – engineering, education, enforcement, emergency medical services, and evaluation – to develop goals, objectives and emphasis areas. The three main emphasis areas are driver behavior, roadways, and special users. Driver behavior issues include impaired driving, young and older drivers, and occupant protection. Roadway issues include lane departures, intersections

and animal-vehicle collisions. Special user issues focus on crashes involving pedestrians, motorcyclists, bicyclists and off-road vehicles.

The SHSP focuses on assessing historical trends in serious injuries, hospitalizations and fatalities and identifying strategies to minimize future incidents. Regarding driver behavior, the report identifies strategies such as strengthening enforcement programs, improving prosecution of driver violations, and educating the public about responsible driving. For roadway strategies, the plan recommends implementing education and awareness programs about roadway characteristics, pursuing engineering improvements to roads, improving emergency services, using data to enhance road safety and optimizing use of the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) to reduce crashes at specific sites. Special User strategies include implementing education and awareness practices, developing engineering solutions to bicycle, pedestrian and motorcyclist safety issues, evaluating programs to enhance special user safety and enforcement programs, and enforcing prohibitions on impaired driving by motorcyclists.

Alaska Marine Safety Educational Association (AMSEA) – AMSEA provides marine safety education and training. They provide educational opportunities for youth, commercial fishermen, subsistence and recreational boaters, as well as specialized training for groups based on their needs.

STA Long-Range Transportation Plan – STA completes a Long-Range Transportation Plan annually. The Plan provides background information about the community and the transportation network in Sitka, and identifies community transportation priorities.

Sitka Bicycle Friendly Coalition – This group promotes safe cycling in Sitka, often hosting community events such as group bike rides, learn-to-ride clinics and bike-to-work promotions along with advocacy efforts for greater cycling awareness and opportunities, such as working toward renewing Sitka's status as a Bicycle Friendly Community.⁸



PHOTO 2. SITKA BICYCLE FRIENDLY COMMUNITY LOGO
Source: <https://sitkacycling.wordpress.com/about/>

Planned transportation projects in Sitka include:

2016

- Nelson Logging Road Upgrades (currently in design; may be constructed in 2017)
- Old Harbor Mountain Road and Eagle Way Upgrades
- Jeff Davis Street Water and Sewer Improvements (may be a 2017 project)
- Katlian Street

2017

- South Lake and West DeGroff Streets Water and Sewer Improvements
- Marine Street Water and Sewer Improvements (Osprey to Erler; more likely a 2018 project)

2018

⁸ "Celebrate Sitka Cycling." Celebrate Sitka Cycling. Web. 10 Nov. 2015. <<https://sitkacycling.wordpress.com/>>.

- Marine Street Water and Sewer Improvements (Erler to Seward)
- DeArmond
- Lincoln Street Upgrade (Jeff Davis to Harbor Drive)
- State of Alaska project: Sawmill Creek Road Upgrade, roundabout to Jeff Davis

C. Emergency Response Resources

Sitka emergency services include the following:

Sitka Fire Department. The Sitka Fire Department includes a Chief, an Assistant Fire Chief, an EMS Captain, six engineers, and an office assistant. In addition, there is a volunteer Assistant Chief, a Fire Captain, two Fire Lieutenants, and one Fire Safety Officer. There are three EMS Division Officers, and a Dive Division Captain and Lieutenant. There is a Search and Rescue (SAR) Captain and two SAR Lieutenants, twenty-five active volunteer firefighters, and a pool of 105 volunteers that could be called in if needed. The department has two engines, one ladder truck, three ambulances and two command vehicles. There are no current training or equipment needs.

Prior to ten years ago, SAR duties were handled by a division in the Fire Department. For about a ten-year period, SAR missions were handled by a separate entity within the City, Sitka Mountain Rescue. Recently, these duties have transitioned back to the Fire Department.

An engineer attends educational events in the elementary schools to provide fire safety education, and staff are available on request to speak to groups in the community about fire safety. The Fire Department also participates in bike rodeos.

On average, there are about fifty SAR missions in a year, with about half land based and half water related. SAR missions are distributed fairly evenly over winter and summer. Lost or stranded travelers on trails are fairly infrequent. Generally, Sitka residents wear life jackets on the water. Private boating incidents often relate to running out of fuel or getting stranded on a low tide. Commercial boating incidents are slightly less common than incidents on private boats.

Bike safety is an increasingly significant concern, and the Fire Chief indicated that lighting, education and reflective clothing may help to prevent accidents.

Sitka Police. The Sitka Police Department includes a Chief of Police, Operations Lieutenant, four sergeants, eight police officers, a school resource officer and a Southeast Alaska Cities Against Drugs Task Force (SEACAD) officer. In addition, the department employs a services lieutenant, five jail officers, four dispatchers and one dispatcher supervisor, a traffic officer, an animal control officer, and a police technician. Sitka Police participate in an annual bike rodeo and in general driver education and enforcement near local schools. Safe biking is an increasing concern, and they plan to increase education and enforcement of safe biking practices. Distracted driving, impaired driving, and pedestrian safety are also growing concerns.

State Troopers. The Sitka State Trooper Post is not a typical trooper post, as they are focused primarily on wildlife issues. The Troopers do assist with SAR missions. If a non-SAR call comes in through 911 to

Sitka Police, the Sitka Police dispatcher will contact EMS, the Fire Department, and/or the Troopers. For SAR missions, the Troopers manage response, which is typically executed through the Fire Department.

Sitka Community Hospital. Sitka Community Hospital offers general medical care, surgery, a 24/7 emergency room, laboratory, radiology, and rehabilitative services, an outpatient clinic, home health monitoring, infusion therapy, visiting specialists and long term care. Medical evacuations are flown to one of the large Seattle, Washington hospitals, or occasionally to Anchorage.

SEREMS. SEREMS staff have emergency medical technician (EMT) training and provide support to Sitka Fire, Police and State Troopers in case of significant local emergencies.

United States Coast Guard Air Station Sitka. Air Station Sitka has four main missions: search and rescue, maritime environmental response, maritime law enforcement, and aid-to-navigation duties. The station averages 130 SAR missions a year, and has a 24-hour SAR alert crew. The station uses three Sikorsky MH60T Jayhawk helicopters that are staffed by two pilots, a flight mechanic, a rescue swimmer, and for MEDEVAC missions, a Flight Surgeon or Aviation Mission Specialist.⁹

III. Documentation of Needs and Priorities

A. Community Priorities

Community priorities were assessed based on discussions with tribal staff, interviews with community members, and a transportation safety survey collected in September and October 2015. The survey was distributed to selected locations in hard copy and available on SurveyMonkey, an on-line survey tool. The questionnaire asked respondents to indicate the importance of each safety issue as a high, medium, or low priority, or indicate they felt it was not an issue, or that they didn't know how to characterize an issue. Fourteen responses were received. The top transportation safety issues identified as high or medium priorities in the survey are noted in Table 1.

TABLE 1. TRANSPORTATION SAFETY SURVEY RESULTS*

| Road Condition Concerns | Response Percentage |
|----------------------------|---------------------|
| Intersection safety | 71% |
| Inadequate street lighting | 71% |
| Poor road condition | 64% |
| Driver Behaviors | Response Percentage |

⁹ "Missions: Air Station Sitka, Alaska." 22 Aug. 2014. Web. 11 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.uscg.mil/d17/airstasitka/Mission.asp>>.

| | |
|---|----------------------------|
| Distracted driving (such as texting or talking on the phone) | 86% |
| Driving vehicle while intoxicated | 86% |
| Lack of helmet use | 79% |
| Speeding motorists | 71% |
| Boating Issues | Response Percentage |
| Lack of life vests | 85% |
| Operating boat while intoxicated | 79% |
| Off-Road Travel Issues | Response Percentage |
| Lack of GPS/SPOT use | 57% |
| Lack of trail marking | 57% |
| Bicycle/Pedestrian Issues | Response Percentage |
| Pedestrian visibility and reflectivity | 100% |
| Lack of sufficient sidewalks/trails/safe places for walking and biking | 71% |
| Lack of bicycle/pedestrian safety education | 71% |
| Other | Response Percentage |
| Inadequate evacuation routes in the event of an emergency or natural disaster | 61% |

*Fourteen survey responses received.

Research performed for the Safety Plan included contacting representatives of nearly thirty community organizations in Sitka to get background information and inquire about their perspectives on transportation safety in Sitka. Feedback from representatives of community organizations focused on the increasing prevalence of biking in the community. Many said that bike safety education efforts need to be augmented, along with enforcement of existing laws. Others felt that additional bike trails and/or better marking of routes is necessary. Pedestrian safety was also a common issue, particularly with respect to visibility and a need for additional crosswalks. Distracted driving was also frequently mentioned as a

growing problem in Sitka. Other feedback included concerns about intoxicated operation of boats and insufficient use of life jackets.

B. Crash Data Overview

Crash data for Sitka was collected from State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT). The Department of Transportation provided crash data for 2008-2012, and reported the following:^{10 11}

Between 2008 and 2012, there were 308 reported crashes, of which 261 were property-damage only incidents. There was one fatality during this period, and seven major-injury accidents. The Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) under DOT is intended to target locations where there have been serious and/or repeated crashes and determine whether safety improvements could prevent future incidents. To do so, the HSIP identifies improvements needed at locations where there have been one fatal crash or two major injury crashes in the most recent five-year period of available data, or intersections with a high safety index rating. The safety index is a ratio of an intersection's accident rate to its critical accident rate.

Using these criteria, the HSIP process determined that Halibut Point Road between Cascade Creek Road and the end of the route met the criteria in that there were one fatality and two serious injury crashes on the segment. The HSIP program determined that these incidents appeared not to be correctable with a particular project. There were also two major injury accidents on Sawmill Creek Road, but it was determined that these were due to driver errors and not likely correctable by a project either.

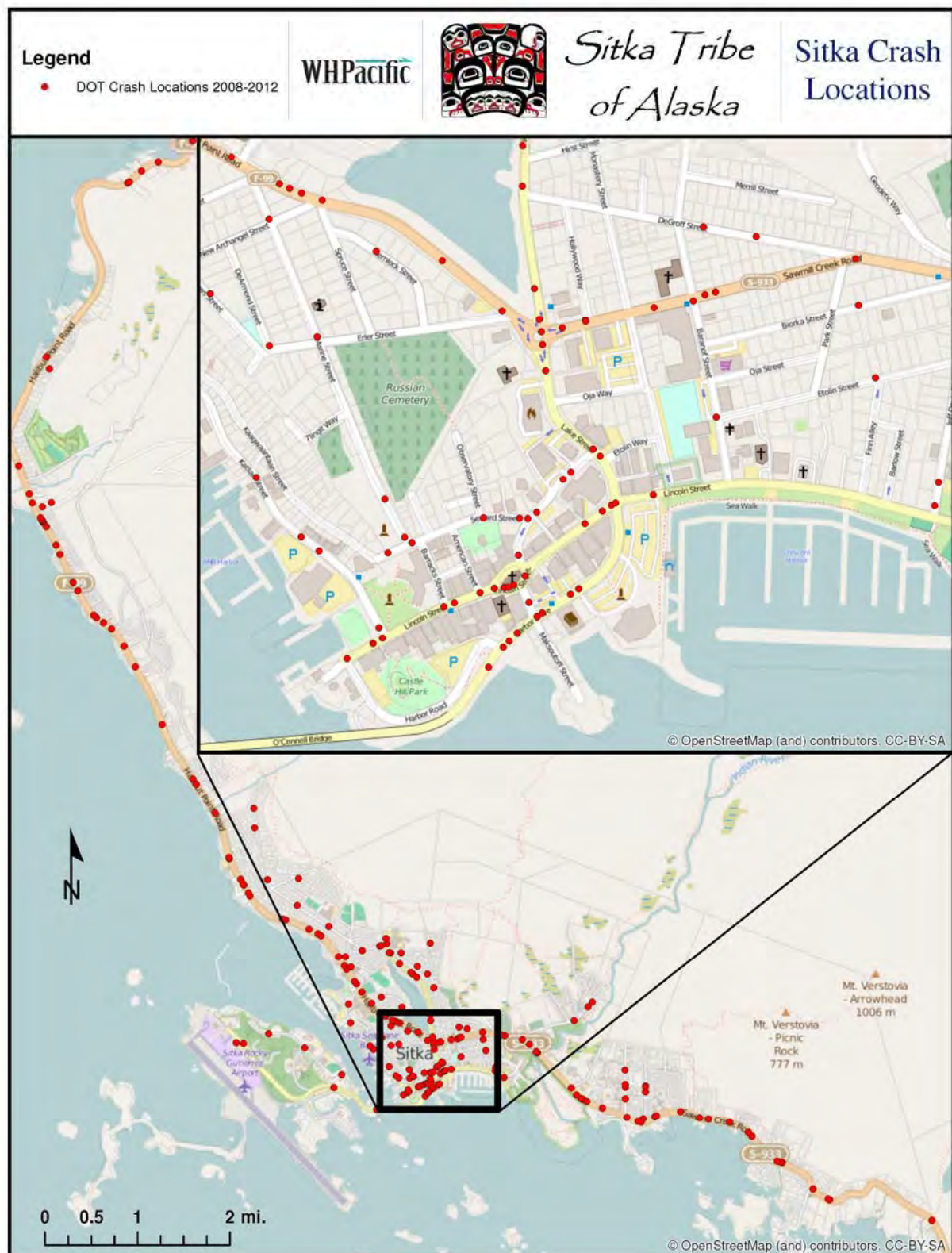
Two intersections on Harbor Drive (Maksoutoff Street and Harbor Way) had a safety index above .9. Recent improvements on Harbor Drive are expected to improve safety on the route, but DOT will continue to monitor the route for "consistent correctable trends."

Crash locations from the DOT 2008-2012 data are shown on Figure 4:

¹⁰ Epstein, David. "Department of Transportation HSIP." E-mail interview. 27 Aug. 2015.

¹¹ DOT Disclaimer: The information in this document is compiled for highway safety planning purposes. Federal law prohibits its discovery or admissibility in litigation against state, tribal or local government that involves a location or locations mentioned in the crash data. 23 U.S.C. § 409; 23 U.S.C. § 148(h)(4); *Walden v. DOT*, 27 P.3d 297, 304-305 (Alaska 2001). This compilation is derived from reports maintained by DMV, and DOT can make no representation about their accuracy.

FIGURE 4. SITKA CRASH LOCATIONS



In addition to the DOT data, data was requested from the Alaska Trauma Registry (ATR) for transportation-related injuries. Data was requested regarding injuries related to transportation, and ATR provided data for 2010-2013.

The data included 40 incidents. Seven were water-related incidents, three were pedestrian incidents, 14 were bicycle incidents, and 15 were vehicle incidents. Use of protective devices, such as helmets or car restraints, was not consistently reported, so it is difficult to draw conclusions about how use of those devices may have impacted the severity of injuries. Drugs or alcohol were factors in six of eighteen injury incidents involving a motor vehicle and five of thirteen bicycle incidents.

IV. Safety Action Plan and Implementation

A. Emphasis Areas, Goals and Strategies

STA has identified the following emphasis areas in accordance with the plan's mission to provide safer conditions for motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians traveling in the vicinity of Sitka.

- Pedestrian and bicyclist safety
- Distracted driving
- Alcohol impaired driving
- Boating safety
- Emergency coordination
- Seatbelt and child restraint use

The following section provides background on each emphasis area, outlines the Tribe's goals in improving conditions, and describes specific strategies in the areas of education, engineering, enforcement, and emergency management. Also identified are recommended timing and potential safety partners. Each emphasis area includes a variety of projects that will require leadership from a variety of agencies in order to accomplish. To ensure implementation of the strategies, although the Tribe will not be the lead on all of the strategies, it will need to be a vocal advocate for all the projects. Formation of a Sitka Transportation Safety Steering Committee – to include the Tribe, CBS, the State of Alaska DOT, SEARHC, Sitka Police and Fire Departments, Sitka Community Hospital, the Sitka School District, SEREMS, the Coast Guard, and Sitka Bicycle Friendly Communities – would help to ensure that these projects are promoted, funded and completed.

Pedestrian and Bicyclist Safety

Background

Community representatives identified bike and pedestrian safety as primary transportation concerns in Sitka. Several mentioned the need to consider installation of crosswalks and pedestrian activated crossing signals (HAWKS) at several locations in Sitka, while others recommended improvements to pedestrian and bicyclist visibility.

There are several locations on Halibut Point Road (HPR) near downtown Sitka where pedestrian crossings are a concern. The 2013 Safe Routes to School Plan recommended installation of a pedestrian activated crossing signal (HAWK) at the intersection of Kashevaroff and HPR, noting that DOT planned to analyze the location. As part of a response to the SRTS inquiry and in preparation for a planned paving project on



PHOTO 3. TYPES OF HAWKS

Source:

<https://www.dmgov.org/Departments/Engineering/Pages/HAWKPedestrianSignal.aspx>

HPR, DOT performed a pedestrian count at the locations. The pedestrian count, which was performed in good weather on a Wednesday in October 2011, indicated no higher than six pedestrians crossing at the location per hour. DOT guidelines prescribe that they typically only install crosswalks at uncontrolled intersections if they document twenty or more people per hour crossing, or fifteen children or elderly pedestrians crossing. The Kashevaroff/HPR intersection did not meet this threshold, and a review of crash data at the site also did not clearly indicate installation of a crosswalk and HAWK. A more recent informal review of crash data at the intersection by DOT mirrored previous analysis. DOT plans to continue to monitor the intersection for changes to pedestrian activity and crash data.

The intersection of Peterson Street and HPR also has been a concern among community members, particularly in light of a bicycle fatality that occurred in December 2012. There is a marked crosswalk at the intersection, and following the accident, DOT installed additional signage and handheld flags available for pedestrians to use while crossing. The intersection should continue to be monitored to determine if additional safety improvements are indicated, including consideration of whether traffic calming efforts or improved signage or lighting could improve safety on this busy stretch of roadway.

Visibility of cyclists and pedestrians throughout Sitka is also a local concern. Sitka's daylight diminishes steadily through the fall, and Sitka receives almost 87 inches of rain annually, with the heaviest rain occurring from September to January.¹² During the dark and rainy winter months, it can be difficult for drivers to see pedestrians and bicyclists. Adequate street lighting, crosswalks, reflective gear and bike lights and headlamps all can improve visibility.

Goal

The goal of this emphasis area is to reduce the number of pedestrian/vehicle conflicts by improving pedestrian/bicycling infrastructure and encouraging safe crossing practices.

¹² "Sitka Climate Data." U.S. Climate Data. Web. 11 Nov. 2015.
<<http://www.usclimatedata.com/climate.php?location=USAK0224>>.

Strategies

Education:

- Consider hiring a bicycle/pedestrian coordinator. With a growing number of users and increasing conflicts between bicyclists, pedestrians and vehicles, a bicycle and pedestrian coordinator could help to monitor evolving safety issues and spearhead education efforts. The coordinator could also serve on the recommended Transportation Steering Committee to keep the group updated on bike and pedestrian issues and projects.
- Institutionalize school-based bicycle and pedestrian education so that it is a part of school curriculum and less subject to availability of funding or staffing from volunteer groups. Community events should supplement school-based education, but provision of a base level of bike and pedestrian safety in the schools is a long-term sound investment in the safety of Sitkans.
- Continue to distribute reflective gear and tape in schools and at community events.
- Create a Sitka pedestrian and cycling safety video.
- Announce pedestrian and cycling safety tips – particularly during the winter months – on websites, in newsletters and in utility bills.

Engineering:

- Continue to monitor Halibut Point Road at Kashevaroff and Peterson Street to determine if improvements are necessary to ensure safety.
- Ensure existing crosswalks are well-maintained, including fresh paint to ensure visibility.
- Complete planned directional signs for cyclists on HPR to prevent wrong-way cycling.
- Assess lighting in the core area to determine if improvements are necessary.

Enforcement:

- Increase enforcement of the helmet requirement for bicycle use, and enlist the help of schools to communicate the law to children.
- Increase enforcement of traffic laws for bicyclists, potentially with a “diversion program” approach: a cyclist who has committed an infraction is given the option to pay a significant fine or pay a lesser fine and attend a basic safe cycling schools class.

Deadline/Timeline: 2016/2017

Potential Partners: CBS, DOT&PF, STA, Sitka Police, Sitka School District, Sitka Community Hospital, Sitka Bicycle Friendly Community Coalition, SEARHC

Distracted Driving

Background

Distraction.gov¹³ defines distracted driving as any activity that could divert a person's attention away from the primary task of driving. All distractions endanger driver, passenger, and bystander safety. These types of distractions include:

- Texting
- Using a cell phone or smartphone
- Eating and drinking
- Talking to passengers
- Grooming
- Reading, including maps
- Using a navigation system
- Watching a video
- Adjusting a radio, CD player, or MP3 player

The site notes that text messaging is especially distracting because it requires visual, manual and cognitive attention from the driver.

The Virginia Tech Transportation Institute reports a driver is three times more likely to get into a crash when engaging in visual-manual subtasks (such as reaching for a phone, dialing and texting) associated with the use of hand-held phones and other portable devices.¹⁴

TABLE 2: ODDS RATIOS FOR DRIVING DISTRACTIONS

| Type of Distraction | Times more likely an event will occur |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Compose/send text message | 23.24 |
| Interact with keyboard/screen | 9.93 |
| Write on pad/notebook | 8.98 |
| Read a map | 7 |
| Use electronic device or 2-way radio | 6.72 |
| Dial cell phone | 5.93 |
| Read newspaper /do paperwork | 3.97 |
| Reach for object in vehicle | 3 |

Source: "The Impact of Hand-Held And Hands-Free Cell Phone Use on Driving Performance." Virginia Tech Transportation Institute.

¹³ Website: <http://www.distraction.gov/get-the-facts/facts-and-statistics.html>.

¹⁴ "The Impact of Hand-Held And Hands-Free Cell Phone Use on Driving Performance." Virginia Tech Transportation Institute. July 2009. Web. 11 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.vtti.vt.edu/featured/?p=193>>.

In 2010, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) conducted a representative phone survey on distracted driving attitudes and behavior. More than half of the respondents indicated that they believe using a cell phone and/or sending a text message or email makes no difference in their own driving performance—yet as passengers, 90 percent said they would feel very unsafe if their drivers were talking on a hand-held cell phone, texting, or e-mailing. These findings are consistent with other research showing that despite well-publicized dangers of distracted driving, many Americans choose to use cell phones while driving.¹⁵

Community members identified distracted driving as a growing local concern. As discussed, a distracted driving ordinance has been drafted and will be reviewed in the next several months by the Sitka Assembly. NHTSA has initiated pilot programs that indicate that drivers do change their cell phone use when faced with good laws, tough enforcement and public education campaigns.¹⁶ A strong ordinance, solid enforcement, and ongoing education about the dangers will help Sitka reduce and prevent distracted driving.

Goal

Reduce the number of crashes, injuries or fatalities caused by distracted driving.

Strategies

Education:

- Distribute educational resources on the dangers of “distracted driving” (e.g. texting, etc.) in high schools and at community events. Information and many downloadable materials are available at distraction.gov.
- Lead by example. Create a policy that employees of the Tribe are not to use handheld phones or text while driving. Encourage other organizations to do the same.

Enforcement:

- Support efforts to pass the distracted driving ordinance under consideration by the Assembly. Once passed, publicize and enforce the ordinance. Consider installing signage along heavily traveled routes publicizing the ordinance.
- **Deadline/Timeline:** 2016/2017



PHOTO 4: POSTER FROM A NATIONAL CAMPAIGN AGAINST DISTRACTED DRIVING.

¹⁵ NHTSA, *Blueprint for Ending Distracted Driving*, June 2012.

¹⁶ "Blueprint for Ending Distracted Driving." Web. 10 Nov. 2015.

<<http://www.distraction.gov/downloads/pdfs/blueprint-for-ending-distracted-driving.pdf>>.

Potential Partners: CBS, STA, Sitka Police, Sitka School District, Sitka Community Hospital

Alcohol Impaired Driving

Background

According to Alaska Trauma Registry data from 2010-2013, drugs or alcohol were factors in six of eighteen injury incidents in Sitka involving a motor vehicle and five of thirteen bicycle incidents. Many more incidents may have occurred that did not result in a hospitalization. When impaired drivers are in minor or single-vehicle accidents, the incidents frequently go unreported. It is likely that the actual percentage of alcohol-related accidents is even greater than the official number reported. Community members and Sitka police agree: alcohol impaired driving needs to be addressed.

Goal

Reduce the number of alcohol related crashes.

Strategies

Engineering:

- Install signage reminding motorists not to drive while intoxicated.

Education:

- Develop educational programs targeting specific audiences, such as elementary and middle school students, or the 18-to-34 age group.
- Create effective media campaigns in both visual and print media.
- Schedule speakers to visit schools with testimonials on the effects of drunk driving. Develop educational programs targeting specific age groups – children, teen drivers, adults, and elders.
- Develop a campaign to have drivers take a pledge to drive sober.
- Enlist the help of SEARHC substance abuse programs to develop targeted rehabilitation programs for DUI offenders.

Enforcement:

- Establish effective sobriety checkpoints and targeted enforcement.
- Enact stronger and more effective legislation, such as license suspension or mandatory ignition interlocks for first time offenders.

Deadline/Timeline: 2016/2017

Potential Partners: CBS, STA, Sitka Police, Sitka School District, Sitka Community Hospital, SEARHC

Boating Safety

Background

Although annual drownings have been decreasing over recent years, the Alaska Department of Epidemiology reports that in 2010, Alaska had the highest number of unintentional drowning deaths in the nation (2010). Between 2007 and 2012, there were 300 drowning deaths, 22 percent of which were in the ocean.¹⁷ Over 90% of drowning fatality victims were not wearing personal floatation devices (PFDs).¹⁸

The statewide *Kids Don't Float (KDF)* injury prevention program has kiosks at each dock in Sitka. The program was developed to address Alaska's high child and youth drowning rate. A collaborative effort between several state and federal agencies, organizations, and local grass-roots sponsors, KDF typically includes both a life jacket loaner station component and an educational component.

While many Sitka boaters do comply with PFD laws, community members report that there is room for improvement. Not all boaters consistently wear PFDs, and growing children may not have a properly-sized life jacket. Every person in the community who boats should have their own appropriately fitted PFD and wear it each time they go boating.

Alcohol use by boaters is another concern. Forty-three percent of drownings between 2007 and 2012 in Alaska were adults suspected or confirmed to have been under the influence of alcohol.¹⁹ There are educational posters up in the Sitka harbor regarding the dangers of drinking and boating and safety ladders installed. Alaska law includes stiff penalties for boating while intoxicated (BWI). The Harbormaster makes an effort to monitor the docks and reports those suspected of intoxication to Sitka Police. However, additional safety efforts could help to minimize operation of boats and presence on the docks while intoxicated.

Goal

Develop awareness of the importance, availability and correct usage of PFDs, and prevent intoxicated residents from operating boats or walking in the harbor area.

¹⁷ Kelly, Devin. "Drowning Deaths in Alaska down but Still Lead Nation." Alaska Dispatch News. 3 June 2014. Web. 10 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.adn.com/article/20140603/drowning-deaths-alaska-down-still-lead-nation-0>>.

¹⁸ "Alaska Kids Don't Float." Web. 10 Nov. 2015.

<http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Chronic/Documents/InjuryPrevention/Assets/KDF/KDF_GeneralInfo.pdf>.

¹⁹ Ibid at 13.

Strategies

Engineering:

- Install additional life ring cabinets in the Sitka Harbor.
- Install permanent signage at the harbor regarding penalties for BWI.
- Install KDF kiosks at area lakes.

Education:

- Develop community awareness, understanding and appreciation for Alaska's cold water, the hazards it presents, and the necessity of wearing a PFD while on a boat or around the water.
- Develop a community campaign about boating safety and life preservers, including the importance of properly fitting life jackets. Emphasize the dangers of alcohol use while boating, penalties for BWI, the necessity for a designated sober pilot on board, and what to do if you see an intoxicated boater.
- Seek additional free life jackets for distribution to community members.

Enforcement:

- Work with local law enforcement to ensure that those under age 18 are wearing a life vest or personal flotation device.
- Work with the Coast Guard and Sitka Police to increase monitoring of intoxication in the Sitka Harbor and on the water.

Deadline/Timeline: 2016/2017

Potential Partners: AMSEA, Kids Don't Float program, SEARHC, Coast Guard

Emergency Coordination

Background

The CBS Police and Fire Departments hold emergency planning meetings to discuss local public safety issues. In order to ensure regular tribal representation and efficient coordination, STA should consistently be a part of these meetings.

Goal

Ensure that STA has consistent input into local emergency planning.

Strategies

Education:

- Consistently include STA in emergency planning meetings of the Sitka Police and Fire Departments.

Deadline/Timeline: 2015

Potential Partners: CBS Police and Fire Departments

Seatbelt and Child Restraint Use

Background

Seatbelt and child restraint use is required by Alaska law for all occupants in a motor vehicle. However, Alaska drivers and passengers often travel unrestrained. There are many reasons why people don't use seatbelts. Often drivers feel that because a trip is short and speeds will be low, restraints are not necessary. However, crashes occurring while driving even as little as ten or fifteen miles per hour (mph) can cause serious injuries and fatalities, especially among children.

SEARHC has monitored child restraint use in Sitka and found that about 86% of children use a car seat. However, use of a restraint appears to decline after children are old enough to use booster seats. Further, SEARHC estimated use of seat belts at 35%. After a seatbelt use pledge drive at Sitka High School, seatbelt use for these drivers was around 75%, suggesting that education efforts can significantly impact levels of use of restraints.²⁰

Child restraints reduce the risk of serious and fatal injuries from crashes by 45-71%, depending on the child's age. Seat belts reduce serious and fatal injuries from crashes by 50%. To bring this dramatic benefit to Sitka, use of restraints needs to be consistent.^{21 22 23}

What's Your Reason for Not Wearing a Seatbelt?

"I'm only going to the store." Actually, this is the best time to wear a safety belt, since 80% of traffic fatalities occur within 25 miles of home and under 40 miles an hour. Sixty percent of crashes involving children occur ten minutes or less from home.

"I won't be in an accident: I'm a good driver." Your good driving record will certainly help you avoid accidents. But even if you're a good driver, a bad driver may still hit you.

"I'll just brace myself." Even if you had the split-second timing to do this, the force of the impact would shatter the arm or leg you used to brace yourself.

"I'm afraid the belt will trap me in the car." Statistically, the best place to be during an accident is in your car. If you're thrown out of the car, you're 25 times more likely to die.

"I don't need a belt - I've got an airbag." Great! An air bag increases the effectiveness of a safety belt by 40 percent. But air bags were never meant to be used in place of safety belts, since they don't protect against side impacts at all.

Source: Oklahoma State University, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

²⁰ Interview: Lesa Way, SEARHC. September 15, 2015 and E-mail, Martha Pearson, SEARHC, September 18, 2015.

²¹ Oklahoma State University. "Seatbelts: Why You Should Use Them." 1993. <http://ehs.okstate.edu/KOPYKIT/seatbelt.htm>. 30 October 2014.

²² Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. "Partners for Child Passenger Safety: Fact and Trend Report" 2008. http://injury.research.chop.edu/sites/default/files/documents/2008_ft.pdf. 30 October 2014. Page 10.

²³ Seat belts: Get the Facts. Retrieved from: <http://www.cdc.gov/Motorvehiclesafety/seatbelts/facts.html>. October 30, 2014.

Goal

Increase use of seatbelt and child restraints.

Strategies

Education:

- With partnership of Sitka Police, conduct a “Click it or Ticket” educational campaign.
- Present information to elementary and high school students about the importance of seatbelt use.
- Offer low- or no-cost child restraints, perhaps in conjunction with food distribution programs.
- Promote child car seat certification.
- Provide instruction in how to install and operate car seats.

Enforcement:

- Actively ticket drivers who are not using seatbelts or child restraints.

Deadline/Timeline: 2016/2017

Potential Partners: STA, Sitka Police, Sitka School District, Sitka Community Hospital, Sitka Bicycle Friendly Community Coalition, SEARHC

B. Implementation

The transportation safety plan is now ready for implementation. This plan should be disseminated in the community to potential safety partners and made available for all residents to view. The first step for STA is to set the foundation for establishment of a Sitka Transportation Safety Steering Committee – including the Tribe, the City of and Borough of Sitka, the State of Alaska DOT, SEARHC, Sitka Police and Fire Departments, Sitka Community Hospital, the Sitka School District, SEREMS, the Coast Guard, and Sitka Bicycle Friendly Communities. Given the community concern about bike and pedestrian issues, one of the first efforts of the committee should be to work toward creating a Bike and Pedestrian Coordinator. This position would most likely be housed within CBS, so close coordination with CBS will be necessary to align priorities and identify funding options.

Compared to so many Alaska communities, Sitka has a wealth of transportation safety resources available to draw from for leadership and support in pursuit of the strategies identified in this plan. Community members are interested and engaged and local organizations are already pursuing valuable transportation safety efforts in Sitka. Given tenacious advocacy by the tribe and other community organizations, this plan can be a springboard for dramatic improvement to transportation safety in Sitka.