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Iowa's Safety Management System: A decade of accomplishments

"When someone asks me who they should call about safety data and strategies, I tell them to call Iowa," says Jim Green with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Kansas City. "This is the most mature and well respected group of its kind in the country."

In March 2005, members and friends of Iowa's Safety Management System (SMS) gathered at ISU to celebrate 10 years of initiatives that have led to such a reputation.

From disjointed efforts to national leader

Until the early 1990s, a variety of safety programs in Iowa hummed along independently of each other, managed by different offices within the Iowa DOT, by the Iowa Department of Public Safety through the Governor's Traffic Safety Bureau, and by other community and regional groups.

Then the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) mandated that each state develop a safety management system. Several Iowans, including Iowa DOT employees Fred Walker and Walt McDonald, saw the advantages of a coordinated, statewide approach for helping to reduce the number of Iowans killed and injured on our roadways each year. Almost immediately, they began organizing such a system.

By mid-1994 an initial coalition was in place. The group consisted of several Iowa DOT offices, the Department of Public Safety through the Governor's Traffic Safety Bureau (GTSB), and other safety professionals.

When the ISTEA mandate was later removed, many states' safety coalitions dissolved. But Iowa remained committed to multidisciplinary, multijurisdictional action. In 1995, the coalition brought in several new partners—FHWA; Iowa Departments of Public Health, Education, and Elder Affairs; the American Association of Retired Persons; several law enforcement groups; additional offices in Iowa Departments of Transportation and Public Safety, and others—and the Iowa SMS was born.

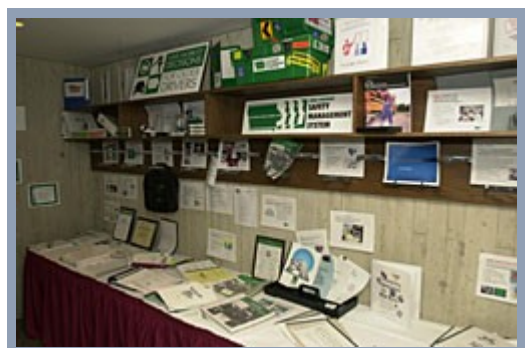
The group got a huge boost in 1999 when a full-time SMS program manager was hired at the Iowa DOT. According to Tom Welch, SMS committee chairman and the Iowa DOT's safety

Editor's note

This article was adapted, with permission, from one by Tracey Bramble in the April 2005 issue of *Inside*, the Iowa DOT's newsletter.



Jack Latterell, retired FHWA Iowa Division and longtime traffic safety advocate, greets attendees at recent 10th anniversary celebration for Iowa SMS.



Iowa SMS has produced many publications and other tools.

engineer from the Office of Traffic and Safety, Mary Stahlhut has been the heart and soul of SMS ever since.

"Mary has done remarkable things with the group since she started managing it in 1999," says Welch.

"I don't think any of us dreamed we could have accomplished so much and serve as a role model nationally."

Groundbreaking initiatives

The key to SMS success is its triple role in facilitating collaboration among safety stakeholders, filling gaps between existing programs, and providing short-term support for worthy efforts that may later become funded programs.

In addition, from the beginning Iowa SMS realized that the success of any effort representing such diverse groups would hinge on coordinating the collection and analysis of all types of safety data used by the various players. The Statewide Traffic Records Advisory Committee (STRAC), organized in June 1994, is an SMS standing subcommittee.

Iowa SMS has also led the way with the following activities:

- In 2001, SMS compiled the Iowa SMS *Toolbox of Highway Safety Strategies* to identify, implement, and evaluate opportunities for highway safety improvement. This practical book was endorsed by Iowa's governor and 11 other state and federal agency leaders, and has since been used nationwide as a model for similar efforts.
- Iowa SMS has facilitated several forums and public education efforts to address specific highway safety issues such as older drivers, younger drivers, and motorcycle safety.
- Iowa SMS has funded diverse projects, including a speed limit task force, deer crash coalition, school bus video camera pilot, bicycle education, crash characteristics/location analysis, and an Emergency Response Information System (ERIS) pilot project.

Welch says that, as much as the Iowa SMS has accomplished, there's still much to be done.

"We really have to take this to the next level and involve more local agencies, since 50 percent of the fatal crashes in Iowa are on secondary and local roads."

For more information

See the Iowa SMS website, www.iowasms.org/. Or contact Mary Stahlhut, Iowa SMS program manager, 515-239-1169, mary.stahlhut@dot.iowa.gov.
