

Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency
PEDESTRIAN SAFETY OBSERVATION STUDY 2015
SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

BACKGROUND

As a part of the ongoing efforts of the Community Traffic Safety Coalition (CTSC) and its South County Bike and Pedestrian Work Group (SCBPWG), the seventh annual Pedestrian Safety Observation Study was conducted from August 22nd through September 27th, 2015. The purpose of this study is to track key pedestrian and motorist behaviors that contribute to increased risk of pedestrian injury and fatality. The aggregate results can help steer future work in Santa Cruz County, supply key data to attract new funding sources, and highlight successes and challenges of existing programming.

METHODS

Observation survey sites were selected based on those in the 2014 survey to provide continuity and a comparable sample of sites countywide. Changes included the elimination of four school sites and the addition of four new school sites. Beginning in 2014, school sites were chosen so as not to include crosswalks with crossing guards. This was to better provide insight on individual pedestrian behavior and to help standardize the interpretation of “due care” by observers. Prior to data collection, volunteers were recruited and signed up for a specific location. Once confirmed, they were provided the following:

- An instruction sheet
- A standardized survey form on which to record their observations
- A letter in English and Spanish that explained the purpose of the study for community members
- An e-mail confirmation describing the location site, days of the week and specific timeframe during which to conduct the observations.

Volunteers were contacted to clarify instructions and procedures, as needed. A total of nine observers collected data at 18 sites, seven in North/Mid County and 11 in Watsonville/South County. Of these, ten sites were located at or near schools, three in North/Mid County and seven in Watsonville/South County. School sites were observed on a weekday during school dismissal time in the afternoon for one hour. Commuter sites were observed on weekdays from 4:15 to 5:45 p.m. Weekend sites were observed on a Saturday or Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

NOTABLE RESULTS

A total of 2,828 pedestrians were observed in 2015, a decrease from the 3,694 observed last year. Key findings are listed below. When making comparisons between cities, it is important to note that 65% of pedestrians observed in 2015 were in the City of Watsonville, 17% in Capitola, 16% in the City of Santa Cruz and 3% in the Unincorporated Area.

Pedestrian Behaviors

- ♦ 75% of pedestrians countywide used due care when entering the roadway.
- ♦ Young adults, ages 19 to 24 years, were least likely to use due care (69%) followed by children (70%) and teens (73%).
- ♦ 73% of pedestrians countywide waited for the walk signal wherever applicable before crossing.

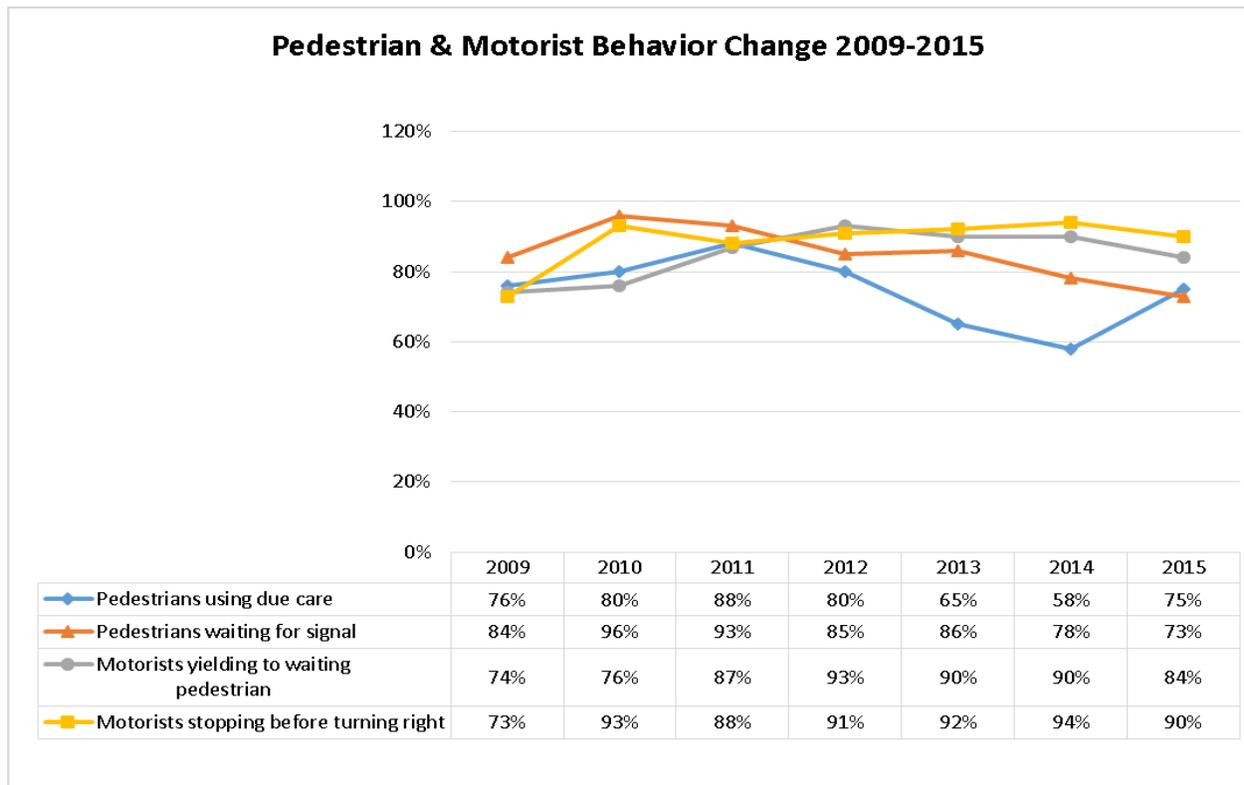
- ◆ Teens, ages 13 to 18 years, were least likely to wait for the walk signal (69%), keeping in mind that teens made up 86% of the pedestrians observed for this behavior.
- ◆ Pedestrians in the City of Watsonville were the least likely to use due care (71%) compared to those in the City of Capitola (80%), City of Santa Cruz (87%) and the Unincorporated Area (87%).

Motorist Behaviors

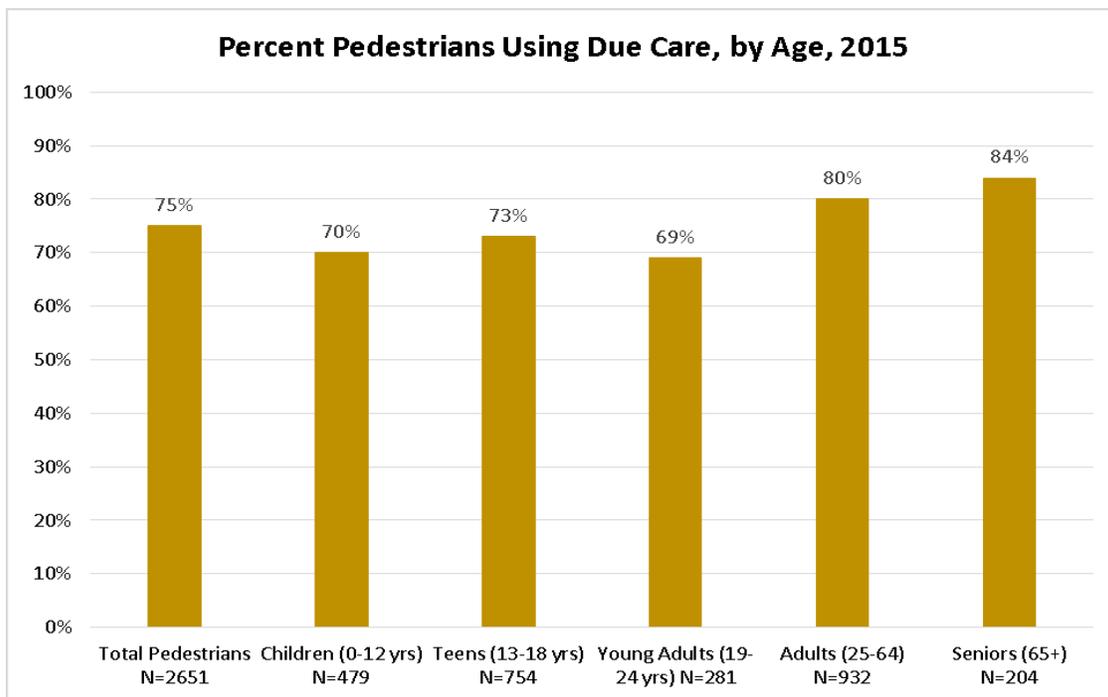
- ◆ 84% of motorists countywide yielded to pedestrians who had the right of way.
- ◆ 90% of motorists countywide stopped before turning right when pedestrians were present.
- ◆ Motorists in the City of Capitola were least likely to yield to a waiting pedestrian (78%) followed by those in the Unincorporated Area (80%), the City of Watsonville (84%), and the City of Santa Cruz (85%).

TRENDS

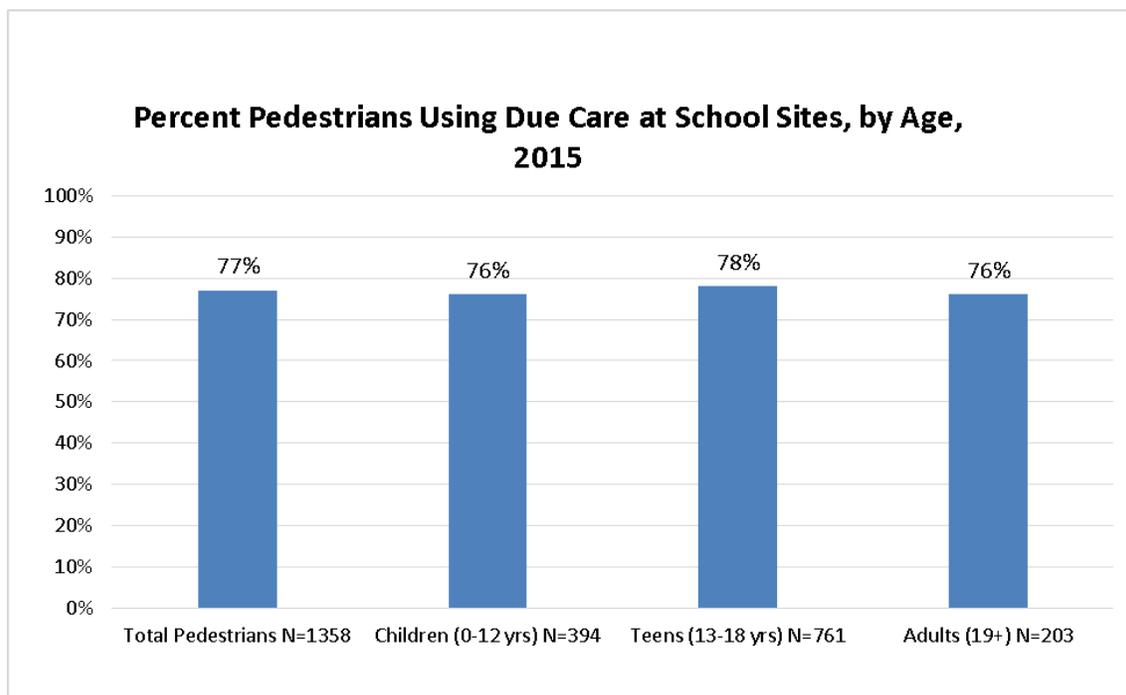
Due to fluctuations in sample size, locations, and volunteers’ interpretation of “due care”, it is difficult to make meaningful comparisons of survey data from year to year. However, this year’s results show that there is still a need for pedestrian safety education throughout Santa Cruz County, particularly among younger pedestrians.



Among age groups, children, teens and young adults used due care less often than adults and seniors. As noted above, pedestrians in the City of Watsonville were less likely to use due care (71%) when compared to those observed in other jurisdictions.



At school sites, pedestrians of all ages were relatively consistent in their use of due care, at 76% to 78%. Please note, because young adults and seniors each made up only 1% of the pedestrians observed at school sites in 2015, all adults 19 and over were combined into a single category in the chart below.



CONCLUSIONS

Survey results indicate a need for continued education, enforcement, and engineering efforts directed toward motorists and pedestrians, with a particular emphasis on children traveling to and from school. While 75% of pedestrians observed used due care when entering the roadway, 654 individuals entered in an unsafe manner, creating a potentially hazardous situation for themselves and others.

Although not officially collected during this survey, 62 pedestrians were noted to be using a mobile or electronic device in the comments section of the data collection sheet, versus 37 last year. This included talking, texting, or wearing ear buds or headphones. Also noted were 98 pedestrians that either did not use the crosswalk at all (crossing mid-block), crossed at the corner but outside the crosswalk, or exited the crosswalk when only part-way across the road. Only 31 similar comments were collected last year. This data suggests that we may want to include information on distracted walking and the improper use of crosswalks in future observations and programming.

This year the number of pedestrians surveyed was lower than in previous years. Change of school location sites more than likely attributed to this. In previous years, school sites with crossing guards were noted to have high numbers of children who would cross when directed to do so, without actually checking for themselves that it was safe to cross. This year, similar behavior was observed at middle and high school sites, where large groups of youth merely “followed the leader” rather than confirming their personal safety to cross. It may be necessary to provide clearer direction for observers on how to consistently capture the behavior of such groups.

Though efforts to refine the survey methods continued this year, confounding factors still exist. These include fluctuations in sample size and age, location, as well as inconsistencies between observations noted and observer bias. More detailed directions for observers may produce more consistent reporting over time.

The Community Traffic Safety Coalition, Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency, Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission and numerous other traffic safety partners are working to reduce traffic collisions involving cyclists and pedestrians and improve bike and pedestrian facilities throughout Santa Cruz County. For more information, contact the Community Traffic Safety Coalition at (831) 454-4312 or visit the website at www.sctrafficsafety.org.

Funding for this project was provided in part by the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission and the California Office of Traffic Safety, through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. For more information, please contact the Community Traffic Safety Coalition c/o the Community Health Education Unit of the County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency at 1070 Emeline Avenue, Santa Cruz, CA 95060, (831) 454-4312.