

SRTS CASE STUDY:

Anchorage, Alaska

Reflective Gear Reveals a Bright Future for SRTS

SafeRoutes
National Center for Safe Routes to School



CASE STUDY

Background

Anchorage, Alaska, has a winter dark period lasting from October until April, in which the sun rises as late as 10:00 a.m. and sets as early as 3:30 p.m. The lack of visibility creates hazardous conditions for students walking or bicycling to school or to the bus stop. Through data review and research, the Alaska Injury Prevention Center (AIPC) has determined the high risk areas and implemented programs to aid students in a safer travel to and from school.

Details

The Safe Routes to School (SRTS) activities in the Anchorage School District began in 2000 with Walk to School Day. For the first two years, the schools sent walkability checklists to parents to fill out after taking their children to the bus stop or to school. After analyzing the checklist data the AIPC found that the major risks facing students were the conditions that make it difficult for drivers to see children walking such as the long winter dark periods and lack of street lighting. To address these issues, the AIPC decided the most effective approach would be to promote the use of reflective gear to the children.

Partnering with FedEx and Safe Kids allowed the AIPC to implement a reflective gear program and experimented with various reflective accessories before deciding to go with reflective tape. The tape allows students to cut out designs and then put their custom design to their backpacks or jackets. AIPC mailed notices to the elementary school principals and to the Parent Teachers Association president at the elementary and middle schools to offer this reflective tape. The notice stated that the first ten schools to contact the AIPC would receive the reflective tape for free. Due to the continued interest after the initial ten schools contacted the AIPC they decided to extend the free tape offer to those schools unable to afford the expense and to charge a modest fee for those schools able to pay for it. As of fall 2007, the AIPC distributed reflective tape to more than 10,000 students at no cost thanks to funding from the Municipality of Anchorage and the Alaska Highway Safety Office.



Mayor Mark Begich and his son Jacob Begich help pedestrians safely cross the road.

The AIPC staff promotes the reflective gear during a reflective tape fashion show at the end of Walk to School Day. During this day, held in the fall, the school pedestrian routes are lined by mascots such as law enforcement officials, Safe Kids members, state workers, superintendents, FedEx employees and even one person dressed in the safety seal mascot uniform. There is a reception for the parents who walk their children to school, and then there is the reflective gear fashion show for the students, which showcases how to wear reflective gear on backpacks, coats and shoes. The students can buy or are given reflective gear at the end of the fashion show.

Reflective Gear Reveals a Bright Future for SRTS Programs

In the spring of each year, safety efforts are directed at bicyclists. For the past two years, Anchorage's local hospital has donated between 75,000 and 100,000 helmets to children. Although the bicycle program's details vary from school to school, usually the schools announce to the students that there are bicycle helmets available and the schools nurse will match the students with proper fitting helmets.

Most of the schools' pedestrian funding comes from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Alaska Highway Safety Office, which grants about \$10,000. The Municipality of Anchorage, the Alaska Native Medical Center and FedEx provide another \$10,000 for reflective equipment and media efforts. The AIPC is looking into applying for federal SRTS funds through the Alaska Department of Transportation.

Results

Pre and post evaluations conducted at Walk to School Day and at the reflective gear fashion show reveal a 30 percent to 70 percent increase in students wearing reflective gear at the next year's event.

The Municipality of Anchorage has decided to provide funding for the next 18 months for various pedestrian and bicycle safety efforts. Although initiating change and fostering awareness can be a slow process, more residents are interested in participating in the Anchorage school safety efforts.

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For more resources and information on Safe Routes to School, please visit the National Center for Safe Routes to School Web site at www.saferoutesinfo.org.