

**Subject:** Congratulations on Your Phase VI Successes!

Hi Everybody! I am back in my Maryland office, in the evenings, while mentoring a candidate for instructor certification in Washington, DC. I have been reflecting on last week's Montana activities, during the lengthy commute, and I wanted to share some of my thoughts with each of you. It was a GREAT week of opportunities to help protect Montana families, and I am happy that I was able to be involved with your projects. You do wonderful work!

Most of Phase VI was dedicated to raising occupant protection awareness, among tribal community members, by empowering public service personnel. We worked with folks that serve the Chippewa-Cree, Assiniboine, and Gros Ventre tribes, and we laid the groundwork for efforts with the Blackfeet tribe. We were also able to work with municipal and county agencies in Harlem and Conrad, and to reach out via radio to Havre citizens. As with all of the 2007 phases, we taught accredited courses for law enforcement and 1<sup>st</sup> responder continuing education. And because this was largely new territory for the HMHB projects, we also presented an updated version of Crash Injury & Healthcare.

Preparing for the week required a great deal of work – identifying key contacts, introducing them to the projects and objectives, following up with them and their colleagues, finding appropriate locations, arranging for materials and equipment, and much more – and I applaud the SKSC coordinators and community leaders for breaking new ground. Through the local work and the direct involvement of state HMHB and MDOT, new relationships are already developing into partnerships. The communities now have functionally aware personnel, local agency coordination, comprehensive assistance from SKSC leaders, and direct contact with state leaders for guidance, support and resources. That is amazing progress, and it is occurring at a record pace!

During the week, I watched the collective energy of class attendees shift and expand. When we first arrived, most folks estimated restraint use at 10% to 40%, and seemed to feel that those who were working on it were doing what they could. By the time they had completed the classroom segments, hands-on activities, and direct communication with Patty Carrell about resources and programs, many were thinking about how they could improve their effectiveness. There was a lot of talk about immediate changes to how attendees would work with their families and friends on their own protection. There was enthusiastic verbal commitment to enhancing education and enforcement efforts. There were discussions about working with the school systems to educate young children and teen drivers, and folks expressed the need to reach childcare providers, grandparents, judges, and prosecutors. Some participants were assessing current emergency transport practices, and others were even talking about working to improve tribal council and legislator awareness.

I've said it before and I'll say it again: your individual and team efforts amaze me! It is proving to be so effective to have local leaders, area coordinators, and state program and resource providers working directly together. I'm not sure if it is because of the complementary commitment to similar goals, the direct support, guidance and relationships, the knowledge that folks on all levels want to empower families to protect themselves, people and agencies counting on each other to do their parts, or something else. It's probably a combination of these and other factors – and the bottom line is that it is working. Congratulations to all of you for doing such great work!

I have attached some of the photos, from the phase. Please let me know if you need any higher resolution versions to add to your newsletters, websites, flyers, correspondence, etc. I know that you will keep communicating and working to save lives and prevent unnecessary injuries! And I look forward to hearing about how the local partnerships and efforts are growing.

Keep up the good work –

Joe

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