

Slow Down, Move Over Laws: Investigating Factors Influencing Drivers' Behavior and Compliance

INTRODUCTION

In 2024, a total of 46 emergency responders were killed after being struck by vehicles while working roadway incidents. The fatalities included 26 law enforcement officers, 12 tow truck operators, 4 Department of Transportation safety service patrol workers, 3 fire/EMS personnel, and 1 road service technician (Emergency Responder Safety Institute, 2024). “Slow Down, Move Over” laws, enacted in all 50 states and Washington, D.C., aim to protect these workers, as well as occupants of disabled vehicles, by requiring passing vehicles to change lanes if possible and/or reduce their speed. Despite their widespread adoption, compliance with these laws is inconsistent, and thus people working or stranded on the roadside continue to face great risks.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a comprehensive, phased, mixed-methods approach. First, the research team documented state Slow Down, Move Over laws and surveyed and interviewed traffic safety stakeholders from State Highway Safety Offices, Departments of Transportation, and law enforcement agencies to gather information about public information and education and enforcement efforts. Next, the research team conducted focus groups with 135 drivers across 10 states, reflecting a diversity of state laws as well as driver experience and age. Real-world behavior of 12,365 drivers passing 169 unique incident scenes was examined using video from existing traffic cameras located on specific highways in 13 states to quantify the percentage of drivers who changed lanes or reduced their speed as required by law, as well as factors influencing compliance. The findings were then used as a basis for several recommendations for promising strategies for increasing safe behavior and compliance with Slow Down, Move Over laws.

KEY FINDINGS

A review of state Slow Down, Move Over laws revealed substantial variability in the types of vehicles protected, specific actions required of motorists when passing the vehicle, and the penalties for non-compliance. Surveys and interviews with stakeholders highlighted frustrations with data

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DOWNLOAD REPORT

ABOUT THE AAA FOUNDATION FOR TRAFFIC SAFETY

Founded in 1947, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety in Washington, D.C., is a nonprofit, publicly supported charitable research and educational organization dedicated to saving lives by preventing traffic crashes and reducing injuries when crashes occur. Funding for this research was provided by voluntary contributions from AAA/CAA and their affiliated motor clubs, individual members, AAA-affiliated insurance companies, and other organizations or sources.

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limitations, variation in legislative and enforcement practices, and the perceived effectiveness of emotional messaging and outreach strategies.

Focus groups with drivers revealed several key insights. While most reported moving over and/or slowing down when approaching roadside incidents or workers, their responses varied based on roadway cues. In general, drivers tended to focus on the “move over” component of the law but neglected the “slow down” component. Awareness of laws was inconsistent, as many participants were unsure of their state’s requirements or which vehicles were protected. They generally expressed that while they personally move over or slow down when passing roadside incidents or workers, they believed that other drivers were less likely to do so. They cited limited enforcement and low visibility of outreach efforts as key barriers to improving compliance.

Real-world video of drivers passing incident scenes revealed moderate levels of compliance. In aggregate, 64% of the vehicles subject to Slow Down, Move Over laws were observed changing lanes and/or reducing speed, whereas 36% did neither. Notably, changing lanes was much more common than slowing down. In states that required a specific speed reduction (e.g., 20 miles per hour below the posted speed limit), very few drivers reduced their speed to the degree required.

Findings reveal a gap between drivers’ self-reported and observed behavior. While most drivers express an intent to slow down and move over, particularly for emergency and law enforcement vehicles, observational data indicates lower actual compliance rates, especially concerning speed reduction. A pervasive lack of detailed public awareness about the details of state Slow Down, Move Over laws, including the types of vehicles protected and the specific actions required, is likely to contribute to this inconsistency. Furthermore, results suggest that the perceived low risk of enforcement, coupled with varying penalties and often ambiguous legal language across jurisdictions, diminishes the deterrent effect of these laws.

To address these critical challenges, the study proposes a set of recommendations across three core areas:

- **Legislation:** Slow Down, Move Over laws should be standardized to ensure protection for all roadside personnel and vehicle types, adopt simplified and consistent language across states, and clarify penalties to be impactful and widely publicized.
- **Public Information and Education:** Stakeholders should employ strategies that focus on developing emotionally compelling and visually clear PSAs that explicitly state legal requirements and highlight the human impact of non-compliance. These campaigns should leverage multimodal outreach channels, including driver’s education, digital platforms (e.g., navigation apps, streaming services), roadway signage (e.g., fixed- and variable-message signs), and traditional media, supported by consistent funding and strategic timing.
- **Enforcement:** Enforcement efforts should emphasize the use of high-visibility enforcement campaigns, utilize routine traffic stops as educational opportunities, and coordinate joint enforcement efforts across agencies. Innovative technologies such as dashcams and automated enforcement systems should be explored and implemented with transparency and an emphasis on education over purely punitive measures.

By addressing these core areas through an integrated approach that combines legislative, educational, and enforcement actions, states can significantly enhance driver awareness, improve compliance with Slow Down, Move Over laws, and ultimately create safer roadside environments for all road users.