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Building a Successful ATV Safety Education Program Utilizing Youth and Community

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Building a Successful ATV Safety Education Program Utilizing Youth and Community

Abstract

When summer is in full swing, many use all terrain vehicles for farming, work, and recreation, blissfully unaware of dangers that lurk while operating an ATV. Our experience with addressing this topic through safety education, grassroots intervention, and community collaboration yielded a replicable, youth-friendly program. Through this community-based action plan, we were able to provide safety education to a diverse population, stressing positive safety practices that reduce accidents thereby reducing injury and death. Using national and community resources, we were able to tailor a program that will prevent and reduce the impact of ATV-related injuries and death.

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The Dangers of ATV Use

Mississippi is one of six states that do not have mandated safety requirements on all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) despite their common use. The rural and farm areas are prime locations for

operating ATVs; however, many operators do so without proper safety equipment and training. Regardless of warnings, almost 50% of ATV-related injuries and over 35% of deaths occur in children 16 and under (Shultz, Wiles, Vajani, & Helmkamp, 2005). Helmet use and formal operational training is low, around 15-20% (Brown, Koeplinger, Mehلمان, Gittelman, & Garcia, 2002).

Hospitalizations due to ATV-related injuries in children are on the rise. Approximately 136,700 injuries were treated in emergency rooms across the US in 2005 (CPSC, 2005). Caucasian adolescent males are at the highest risk, but ATV injuries in children can be prevented through education and vehicle safety operation training. (Miller, Baig, Hayes, & Elton, 2006) With seven million riders across the US, prevention of injury is essential (Killingsworth, Tilford, Parker, Graham, Dick, & Aitken, 2005).

Doing Something About It

The Bolivar County 4-H and community partners, including the Delta Health Alliance (DHA) and Mississippi State University Extension Service, formed an ATV Team with the overall goal to lower accidents, injuries, and deaths. The Team brought together partners, including:

- Chamber of Commerce;
- Police Department;
- Media;
- Honda Dealership;
- Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks; and
- Universities

Through youth leadership, the group conducted a needs assessment, created an action plan, and secured funding through the National 4-H Council. The team focused on education and training at community events through presentations, literature, and interactive kiosk. Events included fishing rodeos, county fairs, community programs, health fairs, and agricultural events. Public service announcements were created and aired at the beginning of hunting season, and booths were set up at local educational events in order to address the "lasting under an hour" activity. One to 4 hour activities included ATV demonstrations, educational events and games, and fishing rodeos as well as booths to increase knowledge and awareness of ATV safety. ATV skill-riding classes were included in activities lasting more than 4 hours.

With funding renewed for year two, the team developed objectives that included the continuation of annual events, increasing youth membership, and increasing safety awareness through media. During the first year and continuing into the second, public service announcements were developed and airtime was bought on local networks. The informative nature of the spots allowed for networks to match airtime, providing more coverage to reach more people (Table 1).

Table 1.
Number of Contacts Made by ATV Safety Program

Category	Year	Number
4-H youth reached	2005	16
	2006	17
Non 4-H youth reached	2005	521
	2006	579
Adults reached	2005	1220
	2006	181
Number reached through media and community events (television and radio)	2005	102,653
	2006	307,528

The group continued education using the *ATV Adventures! Leader Guide*. Other activities throughout the second year were enhancements of first-year activities, such as the Fishing Rodeo and ATV Safety Demonstration, community events, and ASI Rider Certification. Another major success in the second year was that more schools requested ATV safety classes, thus reaching more students.

The team made use of an ATV Safety Kiosk designed by MSU Center for Education Training and Technology staff, funded by the Agromedicine Program. It operates in a video arcade game fashion, providing education about protective equipment, appropriate size ATVs for height, weight, and age, and rules of riding safely. The rider must venture through educational sessions before he

or she can ride the ATV, earning fuel by answering safety questions correctly. Through making prevention and education fun, ATV riders are armed with the proper tools for protection and decision-making.

Replicate by Working Together

Any community can replicate this program with the following ingredients.

- Youth leadership: We engaged youth from the local 4-H to take initiative and guide decisions.
- Community partners: We created non-traditional partnerships that facilitate action.
- Funding: We sought \$7,500 from the National 4-H Council for gear, educational materials, rider workshops, supplies, and media costs.
- In-Kind Contributions: Donations were made by local partners for riding gear, kiosk, staff time, instructor fees, and other expenses. ATVs were loaned to the program by the motor sports dealer.

Positive safety practices can reduce accidents, thereby reducing injuries and death. When developing the ATV safety program, leaders built upon existing 4-H materials. Messages were tailored to the population, and youth leaders guided decision-making and implementation. Because of youth involvement, materials were more culturally relevant and appealing to the target audience. The safety message was consistently promoted through activities, community events, and school settings.

What Does This Mean to Me?

Overall success of the activities and programs that the team conducted are determined by the reduction in ATV-related injuries and deaths in the area. The number of persons reached through the media and through sign-in sheets at seminars were an indication of those who received education, and results showed that the team met or exceeded their goal of educating at least 10% of those in attendance. While Bolivar County is rural, people who benefited from the information extended to the surrounding region, encompassing an estimated 12-county area.

Through this community-based action plan, the team was able to provide safety education to a diverse population. In both years, demographics revealed that approximately the same number of Caucasians and African Americans received information. Answers to post-tests that reflected positive safety behaviors were found in the majority of the tests. This program is successful in educating a diverse population in age, race, and gender at the grassroots level.

Health and safety implications are such that the knowledge gained from the activities and presentations can prevent risky behaviors and inappropriate use of the vehicle, which is reasonably expected to lead to fewer accidents, injuries, and deaths. Advocacy efforts by health care providers can lead to more stringent state-level requirements that will help reduce the rates of ATV-related injuries among young riders (Keenan & Bratton, 2004). Mississippi currently ranks 12th in the nation for ATV deaths (CPSC, 2005). With a total population of 2.9 million and ranking 31st in the nation for population, Mississippi has a disproportionate share of ATV accidents. These data reinforce the current stance that legislation prohibiting the use of ATVs in children under the age of 16 years should be pursued (Upperman, Shultz, Gaines, et al., 2003). Until such legislation is available, the best course of action is prevention through education.

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