

Road safety audit? Assessment?

Here's the situation: You have identified a roadway section where safety has become an issue. You want to address the situation, but aren't sure how to begin mitigation. A safety review seems like a great way to begin, but a couple of questions stand in your way: Do you need to conduct a road safety *audit* or a road safety *assessment*? What is the difference between the two and how do they work?

In short, a safety assessment is a local process, using in-house agency and community resources. A safety audit brings in team members from several disciplines outside the agency and results in a formal written report with a written response from the agency.

Considering a wide range of ideas and recommendations can help you determine acceptable and effective solutions to safety concerns, real and perceived. While a safety assessment team may not consist of as many members, it should include as many disciplines as possible, especially the unique insights from law enforcement.

Why include law enforcement and perhaps even private citizens?

Because they can identify their unique needs and perspectives. Engineering solutions aren't possible for everything.

What law enforcement contributes

Members of law enforcement can identify places where they'd like to increase enforcement (such as where speeding or a high incidence of DUI are problems), but cannot do so safely because the shoulders are too narrow to allow them to pull over possible offenders. (With a software program such as Incident Mapping and Analysis Tools [IMAT] officers can identify locations where focused enforcement would be more effective in applying scarce resources.)

An increase in law enforcement presence may encourage compliance with traffic laws, resulting in a safer stretch of road, but road characteristics may be standing in the way of increased sheriff or police patrols.

Law enforcement agents also can identify areas where they issue citations, but where crashes have not occurred, so the areas aren't included in traffic crash databases—yet.

What citizens contribute

Citizens who regularly travel the stretch of road you're going to evaluate bring the perspective of regular users of that road. Their input is important because they drive the road in all kinds of conditions (e.g., traffic and weather). They may be able to identify locations that they feel are unsafe for reasons that may not be obvious to others.

Commuters can also offer more information that is useful in responding to citizen complaints.

Why consider a safety audit over an assessment?

A safety audit involves a multidisciplinary team to analyze conditions and data in a broad-based manner. Safety audits can save money in the long run by helping you focus on making improvements more effectively, applying resources where they will have the greatest impact.

The table below summarizes the elements that figure into evaluating road safety and

shows the differences between safety assessments and safety audits.

For more information

If you want to learn more about the process for conducting a safety audit or assessment in your agency, staff at the FHWA, Iowa DOT, Office of Traffic and Safety, and/or CTRE can offer advice, answer questions, or provide training.

If you would like to schedule an actual safety audit or safety review on one of your roads, a team from these offices could be of assistance. Good contacts for information on these valuable tools are

Jerry Roche, FHWA Safety Engineer, 515-233-7323, Jerry.Roche@fhwa.dot.gov.

Troy Jerman, Iowa DOT, Office of Traffic and Safety, 515-239-1470.

Tom McDonald, Iowa Safety Circuit Rider, CTRE, 515-294-6384, tmcdonal@iastate.edu ■

Safety Review Elements	Safety Assessment	Safety Audit
Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reactive to crashes that have occurred less formal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> proactive to prevent crashes formal
Team composition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> local, agency, and in-house design staff may not be as objective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> multidisciplinary from outside the agency independent perspective
Team members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> in-house agency staff as multidisciplinary as possible possibly an outside safety consultant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a safety consultant road work professionals engineering staff members of law enforcement education officials emergency response staff private citizens
Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> compliance with established standards past crash history 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> human factors multimodal needs crash data
Field examination	no set standard	comprehensive check list
Tools	local records	GIS-SAVER, CMAT, IMAT
Data needs/ Analysis methods	Local, ITSDS, and DOT crash data	ITSDS, and DOT crash data plus data about traffic volume, mix, special users (bikes, pedestrians), and terrain
Final report	no report	report to the agency
Response from the agency	no response back from agency	agency responds