

# Research Spotlight

## Project Information

**REPORT NAME:** Implementation of Quick Clearance in Michigan

**START DATE:** October 2011

**REPORT DATE:** September 2012

**RESEARCH REPORT NUMBER:**  
RC-1583

**TOTAL COST:** \$185,254.98

**COST SHARING:** 20% MDOT, 80% FHWA through the SPR, Part II, Program

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## Spreading the word about the quick clearance law

A 2010 state law requires drivers who have been in minor crashes to move their vehicles to the side of the road, a practice that improves safety by preventing secondary crashes and also reduces traffic congestion. This research developed targeted strategies to help MDOT communicate the recent rule to drivers throughout the state.

### Problem

Motorists traditionally were taught to leave their vehicles in place after a crash occurred to make it easier for police to reconstruct the incident and evaluate who was at fault. However, the practice of leaving vehicles in the roadway can lead to secondary crashes as other drivers encounter unexpectedly blocked lanes.

To minimize secondary crashes, the Michigan Legislature passed a law in 2010 that requires motorists who have been in a crash to move their vehicles to the side of the road if there are no injuries and the vehicles are drivable. Several other states have similar “quick clearance” laws, which also reduce traffic delays associated with minor crashes.

MDOT and the Michigan State Police (MSP) adopted a message - “If you can steer it, clear it!” - to concisely explain the new law. However, in the years since the quick clearance law was passed, the department has not been able to devote substantial resources to publicizing it, and anecdotal evidence indicated that many drivers were not aware of the law.



To educate drivers about the quick clearance law, campaign materials will feature the character Captain Clearit with the message, “If you can steer it, clear it!”

### Approach

MDOT decided to initiate a research project to gauge drivers’ awareness of the quick clearance law and identify communication strategies that would be most effective at improving their understanding and compliance. The department was

*“This project helped us identify the types of drivers who may not be aware of the quick clearance law and provided us with a cohesive, eye-catching campaign to reach drivers statewide.”*

**Angie Kremer, P.E.**  
Project Manager

especially interested in low-cost methods for reaching drivers across the state.

## Research

To begin, researchers reviewed the methods other states have used to communicate quick clearance laws to the public, contacting several states for sample materials such as brochures, dynamic message sign text and social media messages. Next, they surveyed 800 Michigan drivers to learn whether they were aware of and compliant with the law, and the sources they rely on for transportation information. Researchers also contacted representatives of law enforcement agencies, emergency dispatch centers and towing companies to get their perspectives on driver compliance and ideas for gaining compliance.

## Results

The survey found that while most drivers move their vehicles to the side of the road after a crash, they are unaware they are legally required to do so. Demographic groups that were less aware of the law and less likely to comply with it included older drivers, drivers with lower education levels, and residents of rural areas. Researchers developed sample campaign materials focused on communicating three facts

about quick clearance: it is a matter of safety, it is our law, and complying will not impact the determination of fault for insurance purposes.

The research team designed a superhero character named Captain ClearIt to increase public recognition of the campaign’s messages. Researchers determined that “If you can steer it, clear it!” was an effective slogan, and recommended adding a second sentence: “It’s our law!” This phrase, which has been used in MDOT and MSP safety belt campaigns, is designed to promote public ownership of highway safety.

Researchers recommended using a combination of traditional communication methods (such as dynamic message signs, radio and television ads, press releases, and brochures) and social media strategies to reach drivers in multiple demographic groups. Social media outlets such as MDOT’s Facebook page and Twitter feed allow the department to reach a large number of drivers inexpensively, while traditional advertising can be cost-effective in rural areas where advertising costs are lower. Researchers also suggested leveraging social media by holding a contest to develop promotional materials such as videos, jingles and online games that would become part of the campaign. To help MDOT execute these strategies, researchers developed sample campaign materials that the department can modify as needed.

As an additional outreach method, researchers recommended training emergency dispatchers, first responders and tow truck operators to communicate the law to drivers who have been in minor crashes. The report includes a sample script that can be used as a training tool for dispatchers.

As a final component of this project, researchers analyzed the department’s statewide incident management database, which houses information on crashes and other unplanned events that close parts

of the road. They recommended changes designed to improve the data quality and better facilitate before-and-after studies that could measure the impacts of initiatives like the quick clearance law on incident duration. MDOT tracks incident duration as a performance measure, with a goal that no more than 25 percent of incidents last longer than 120 minutes.

## Value

Improving driver compliance with the quick clearance law would allow Michigan residents to experience the law’s full safety and mobility benefits. This research provided MDOT with a baseline measurement of drivers’ awareness of the law and a plan for communicating the quick clearance message to drivers statewide.

## Research Administration

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### This final report is available online at

[www.michigan.gov/documents/mdot/MDOT\\_Research\\_Report\\_RC1583\\_405599\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdot/MDOT_Research_Report_RC1583_405599_7.pdf).

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