

# Studded-Tire Damage Public Information Campaign Report

**Report prepared by:**  
Desautel Hege Communications (DH)



Public Relations • Advertising  
Branding • Research • Digital

**For the**  
Washington State Department of Transportation



Washington State  
Department of Transportation

December 2020

## Campaign Background

From the revenues generated by the five dollar per studded tire fee under RCW 46.37.427 and at the request of the Legislature, WSDOT implemented a pilot media-based public information campaign regarding the damage of studded tire use on state and local roadways in Spokane county in the winter of 2018/2019.

For the winter of 2019/2020, that campaign was extended for a second year in Spokane county and expanded to include Whatcom county for the first time.

The 2019 Transportation Budget included funding for this public information campaign. ESHB 1160, Section 217 (3), reads as follows:

From the revenues generated by the five dollar per studded tire fee under RCW 46.37.427, \$250,000 of the motor vehicle account – state appropriation is provided solely for the department, in consultation with the appropriate local jurisdictions and relevant stakeholder groups, to establish a pilot media-based public information campaign regarding the damage of studded tire use on state and local roadways in Whatcom county, and to continue the existing pilot information campaign in Spokane county. The reason for the geographic selection of Spokane and Whatcom counties is based on the high utilization of studded tires in these jurisdictions. The public information campaigns must primarily focus on making the consumer aware of the safety implications of other drivers, road deterioration, financial impact for taxpayers, and, secondarily, the alternatives to studded tires. The Whatcom county pilot media-based public information campaign must begin by September 1, 2020. By January 14, 2021, the department must provide the transportation committees of the legislature an update on the Spokane and Whatcom county pilot media-based public information campaigns. <http://lawfilesexst.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2019-20/Pdf/Bills/Session Laws/House/1160-S.SL.pdf> p.39

Although the Whatcom county pilot was required to begin as late as September 1, 2020, in consultation with the Legislature, it was determined that the campaign would be deployed in the winter of 2019/2020 to capitalize on momentum from the previous year's initial campaign in Spokane county. In addition, with the need to purchase media in both Spokane and Whatcom counties, it was more cost effective to focus the entire budget on one season instead of two.

WSDOT utilized its on-call public involvement list to obtain a consultant to conduct the public information campaign. Spokane-based marketing firm Desautel Hege Communications (DH) was the successful vendor that created the original campaign in fall 2018 and extended and expanded it in 2019.

## Campaign Development

The original campaign in the winter of 2018/2019 (Year 1) focused on the damage studded tires cause to roadways, but also raised questions regarding their safety and performance which influence consumer buying decisions and are therefore more likely to lead to behavior change than the risk of damaged roadways alone.

For the second year's campaign (Year 2), an advisory group was consulted to determine the best use of campaign assets. They confirmed that even though safety is a key factor in leading to behavior change, there was not enough available supporting data on safety claims to strongly communicate that proposition to the public in an advertising medium. In addition, since Year 1 research findings

indicated the perception that studded tires offer superior performance, it was determined that the best use of campaign assets was to focus messaging on the superior technology and performance of studless winter tires, and to cover safety and road-damage topics on the campaign landing page [DitchTheStuds.com](http://DitchTheStuds.com).

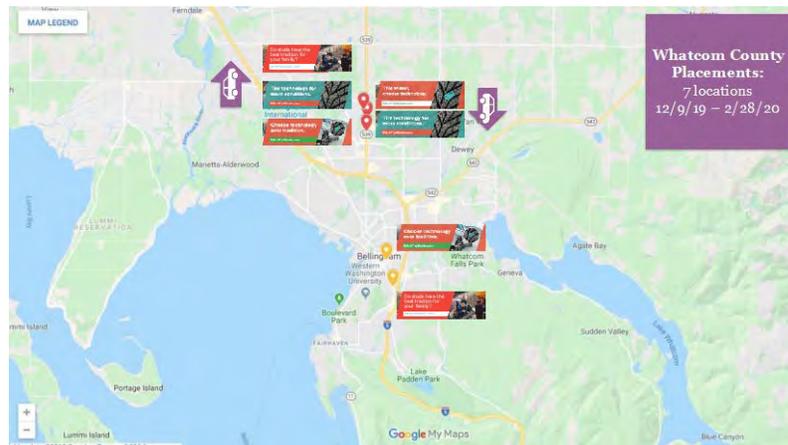
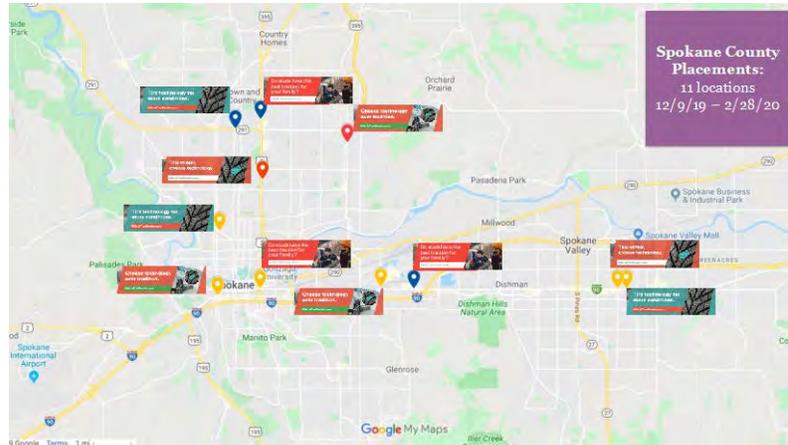
WSDOT worked with DH to develop campaign strategy, create assets and place the media buys. At key milestones, like concept presentations and final creative decisions, DH and WSDOT consulted with an advisory group made up of tire industry professionals and government officials. This group included:

Andy Billig, State Senator  
Erica Bramlet, Senate Transportation Committee Staff  
David Bremer, State Representative  
Kate Burke, City of Spokane  
Mayor David Condon, City of Spokane  
Pat Dunn, Tire Industry  
Mary Dye, State Representative  
Doug Ericksen, State Senator  
Jenny Graham, State Representative  
Bruce Gryniewski, Gallatin Public Affairs  
Tammie Hetrick, NW R Dealers  
Jeff Holy, State Senator  
Mark Johnson, Washington Retail  
Josh Kerns, Spokane County  
Joel Kretz, State Representative  
Jordan Krone, Legislative Assistant to Senator Liz Lovelett  
Mary Kuney, Spokane County  
Debra Lekanoff, State Representative  
Liz Lovelett, State Senator  
Jaquelin Maycumber, State Representative  
Hannah McCarty, State Senate Counsel  
Bob McCaslin, State Representative  
Megan McPhaden, House Transportation Committee Staff  
Bryon Moore, Senate Transportation Committee Staff  
Jeff Morris, State Representative  
Rick Nordness, Tire Industry  
Timm Ormsby, State Representative  
Mike Padden, State Senator  
Martin Presley, Associate Staff Counsel, Senate Republican Caucus  
Dana Quam, Senior Counsel, House Republican Caucus  
Marcus Riccelli, State Representative  
Theresa Sanders, City of Spokane  
Joe Schmick, State Representative  
Mark Schoesler, State Senator  
Matt Shea, State Representative  
Sharon Shewmake, State Representative  
Shelly Short, State Senator  
Scott Simmons, City of Spokane  
Heather Trautman, City of Spokane  
Luanne Van Werven, State Representative  
Mike Volz, State Representative  
Bob Wilson, Whatcom Council of Governments  
Jennifer Ziegler, Tire Industry

# Campaign Summary

The Year 2 campaign ran from December 1, 2019 through February 28, 2020 which is a traditionally heavy winter tire buying period. Like the previous year, the campaign deployed messages through billboards, radio advertisements and online advertisements.

## Billboards



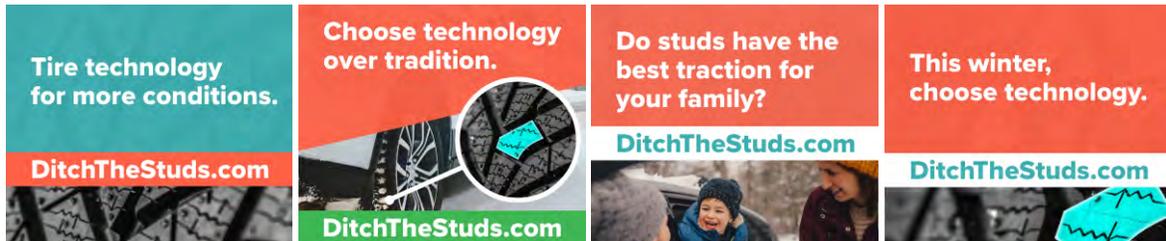
The campaign placed 11 billboards in the Spokane market and 7 billboards in the Whatcom market during this time period in high traffic areas. Spokane billboards received an estimated 10,674,464 impressions (the number of people who saw an ad) and Whatcom billboards received an estimated 4,531,476 impressions during the campaign period. Estimated impressions are based on Lamar's Geopath Ratings calculated through a combination of consumer trip data from mobile devices, size and line of sight of ad placement, and traffic data.

## Radio

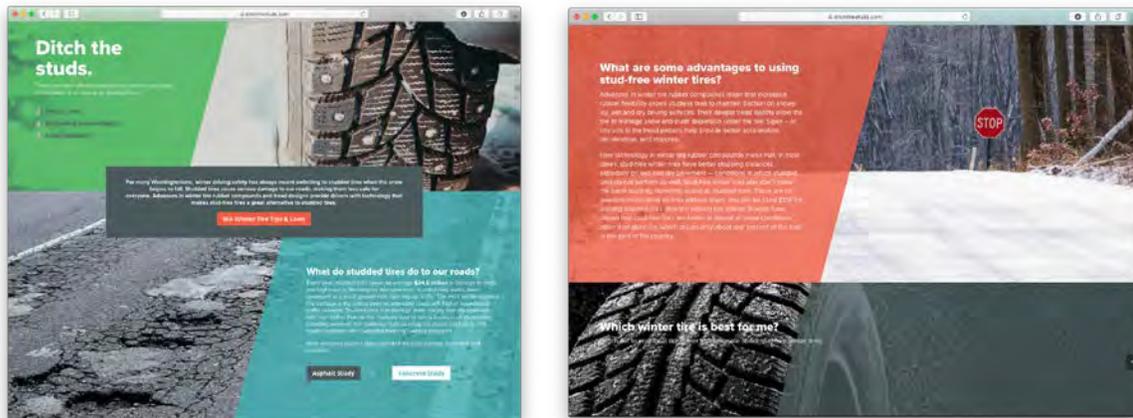
Radio was deployed to reach people when they were driving and receptive to messages regarding tire decisions. 2,308 radio spots ran during the campaign across 7 stations in Spokane county and 1,160 spots ran across 5 stations in Whatcom county. Half of the placements were run at no charge through a negotiated media buy.

## Digital Display and Landing Page

Digital display advertising targeted drivers in both regions. Digital ads received 1,970,180 impressions and drove 3,046 individuals to the landing page.



The landing page for the campaign, DitchTheStuds.com, was updated with additional specific content that speaks more directly to performance and technology as well as safety. All campaign media (billboards, radio, and digital) encouraged audiences to visit the landing page.



## Tracking Study

In the first year of the campaign, DH developed and deployed an awareness and usage survey to 450 drivers in the Spokane region to understand the current usage of studded tires as well as the awareness of their contribution to road damage. The survey participants were recruited through Strategic Research Associates and the survey methodology included online and telephone collection. This survey was repeated in 2019/2020 in both Spokane and Whatcom counties to continue to measure change in studded tire usage and awareness.

The full Studded Tires Tracking Study Report is available upon request. The main findings are summarized below.

### There are clear differences in tire usage levels, opinions and education levels in the two counties

Spokane county residents are more likely to utilize any kind of winter tire – studded or studless – when compared to Whatcom county residents, who are more likely to use all-season tires. This also aligns

with self-reported confidence levels regarding education on winter tire options. 77% of Spokane county respondents indicated they are informed, or well informed, about winter tire options compared to only 61% of Whatcom residents.

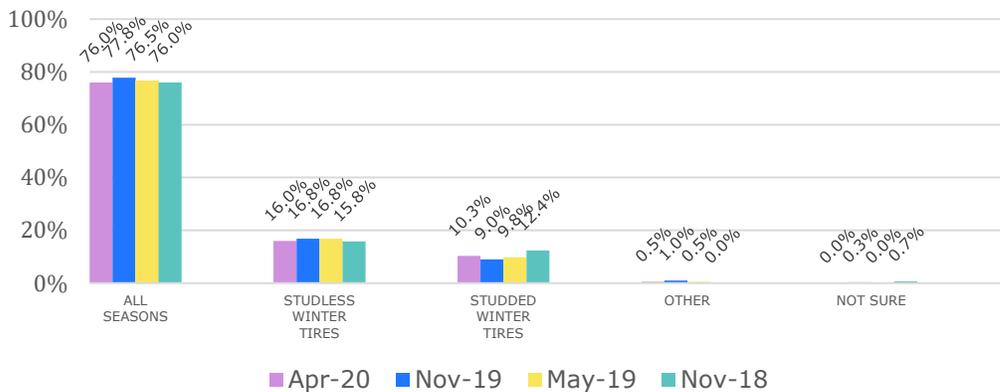
When asked to rank tire features or asked how much they agree with statements regarding winter tires, Whatcom county residents had fewer extreme answers across the board. For example, when asked to rank tire features where “1” is most important and “11” is least important, all-weather grip ranked highly as desired features in a tire for both counties. However, it received a composite ranking of 3.11 in Spokane county and a 5.48 in Whatcom county. This more moderate tendency on this topic can be observed in several questions.

Overall, these data points indicate that winter tires are more top-of-mind for Spokane county residents than Whatcom county residents.

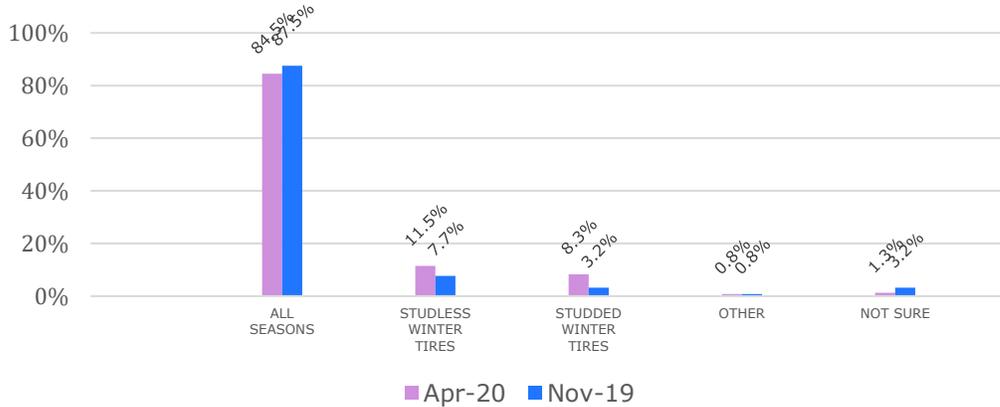
**There has been little change in self-reported tire usage**

Over the course of the campaigns, there have been small shifts in reported usage of the types of tires survey respondents use in Spokane and Whatcom counties. Self-reported usage of studded tires remains low at 10.3% in Spokane county and 8.3% in Whatcom county. Prior to the first pilot campaign, reported usage of studded tires in Spokane county was 12.4%. This does not indicate that there has been a dramatic change in usage since 2018, but the usage of studded tires can be observed to be slowly decreasing.

Spokane County



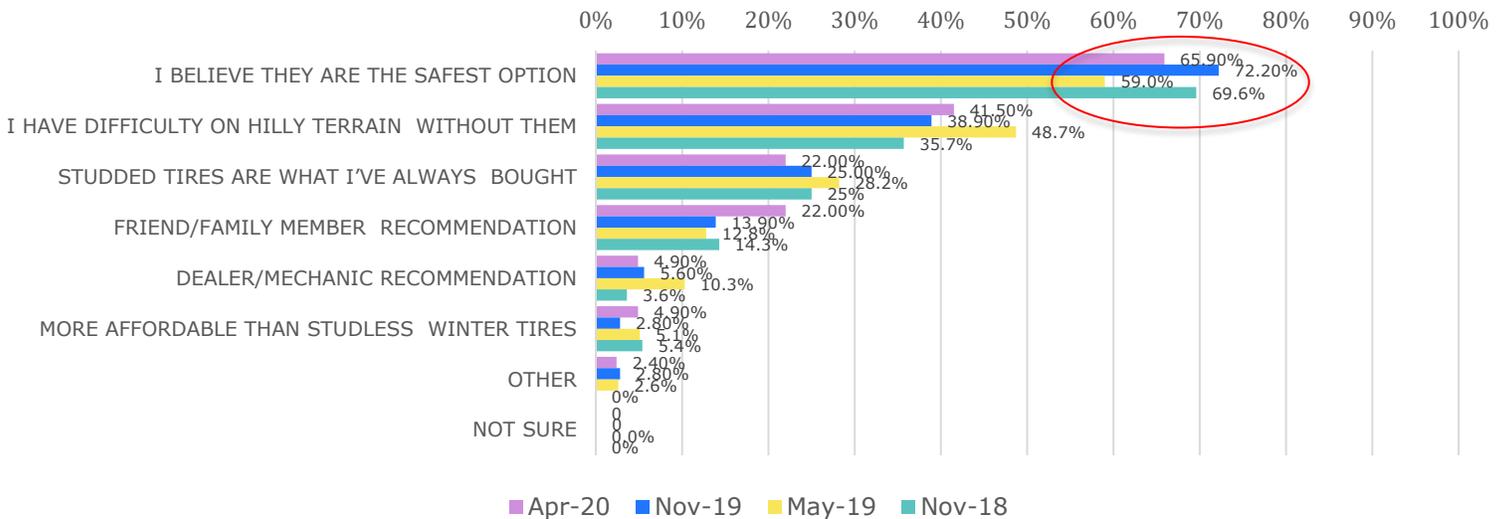
## Whatcom County



### Claimed dependence on studs for safety reasons fluctuates by season

Consistently across two years of the campaign running in Spokane county, those who drive on studded tires are more likely to cite safety as the reason for driving on studded tires in the fall than they are when asked in the spring.

## Spokane



- In the first year of the campaign (2018/2019) in Spokane county, nearly 70% of individuals who drove on studs cited safety as their main reason before the campaign and only 59% cited safety as the main reason when asked again in the spring.
- In the second year of the campaign (2019/2020), 72% of individuals who drove on studs cited safety as their main reason before the campaign and only 65% cited safety as the main reason when asked again in the spring.

- This trend also appears in the first year (2019/2020) of data in Whatcom county – 83% of individuals who drove on studs cited safety as their main reason before the campaign and only 63% cited safety as the main reason when asked again in the spring.

Following safety, “I have trouble on hilly terrain,” was the second highest reason for using studded tires that was identified in both counties. This aligns with the focus on performance messaging in Year 2 of the campaign.

### **Whatcom county residents are less likely to know that studded tires cause road damage**

96% of Spokane county residents claimed they knew that studded tires cause road damage in comparison to only 69% of Whatcom county residents. This represents a clear difference in familiarity and knowledge regarding studded tires between the two counties.

However, in both counties, respondents indicated that knowing studded tires cause up to \$29 M in road damage\* each year would make them less likely to consider studded tires in the future. The knowledge of studs causing damage is unlikely to grow significantly past its current 96% level in Spokane county. However, there is opportunity for educational messaging in Whatcom county.

### **Radio is the most recalled element of this campaign**

In both counties, respondents indicated they recalled hearing radio advertisements advising them to explore alternatives to studded tires the previous winter. Respondents also recalled seeing TV advertisements, even though that was not an element of our campaign.

Technical brief for damage to Asphalt Pavements (\$8M-\$11M annually):

<https://www.wsdot.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2010/10/20/Studded-Tire-Damage-To-Asphalt-Estimate.pdf>

Technical brief for damage to Concrete Pavements (\$12M-\$18M annually):

<https://www.wsdot.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2010/10/20/Studded-Tire-Damage-To-Concrete-Estimate.pdf>