



North Carolina Department of Public Safety

Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Roy Cooper, Governor
Eddie M. Buffalo, Jr., Secretary

William L. Lassiter, Deputy Secretary

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services

From: Eddie M. Buffalo, Jr., Secretary, Department of Public Safety
William L. Lassiter, Deputy Secretary, Division of Juvenile Justice




Firearm Safe Storage Awareness Initiative Report

Subject:

Sept. 1, 2024

Date:

Pursuant to S.L. 2023-8, Section 3. (f), *The Department of Public Safety, in collaboration with the Department of Health and Human Services and the Wildlife Resources Commission, shall submit a report to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services detailing the progress in meeting the requirements set forth in subsection (a) of this section. The report required under this subsection shall be submitted by September 1, 2024.*

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Secure All Firearms Effectively



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Introduction

This report is required by General Statute §2023-8, Section 3, which states:

S.L. 2023-8, Section 3. (a) The Department of Public Safety (Department), in collaboration with the Department of Health and Human Services and the Wildlife Resources Commission (Commission), shall launch a two-year statewide firearm safe storage awareness initiative to educate the public about the importance of the safe storage of firearms and to facilitate the distribution of gun locks. The initiative required under this section shall include the development of (i) the website and toolkit required under subsection (b) of this section and (ii) the outreach process required under subsection (c) of this section.

SECTION 3. (b) Development of Website and Toolkit. – The Department shall develop a website to provide information to the public about (i) the importance of the safe storage of a firearm, especially with respect to access by children and youth, (ii) methods for safely storing a firearm, (iii) contact information for obtaining free gun locks, if available, (iv) information on State laws related to the safe storage of firearms, (v) links to webpages for various resources related to firearm safety such as resources addressing domestic violence, hunter education, and suicide prevention, and (vi) access to a toolkit of information that local communities may use to launch firearm safe storage initiatives at the local level. The toolkit shall provide materials and resources that may be tailored to a community's needs and used for launching local education and awareness campaigns, events, and local groups focused on firearm safe storage and the distribution of free or discounted gun locks. The website and toolkit required under this section shall be developed by July 1, 2024. Senate Bill 41 Session Law 2023-8 Page 3

SECTION 3.(c) Development of State-Coordinated Outreach. – Upon development of the website and toolkit required under subsection (b) of this section, the Department shall develop and implement an outreach process for disseminating the information and toolkit described in subsection (b) of this section to the public and to local communities, as well as the provision of technical assistance to local communities to assist them in utilizing the toolkit to launch local initiatives.

SECTION 3.(d) Use of Third-Party Entity. – The Department may contract with a third-party entity with relevant expertise related to public health and injury prevention to launch the firearm safe storage awareness initiative required under subsection (a) of this section.

SECTION 3.(e) Prohibition on Advocacy. – The firearm safe storage awareness initiative required under subsection (a) of this section and any State funds used to launch and maintain the initiative shall not be used to advocate, promote, or lobby for the creation of new or the revision of existing laws regulating firearms. The firearm safe storage awareness initiative and any State funds used to launch or maintain the initiative shall only be used for the purposes set forth in subsections (b) through (d) of this section and only to explain and promote existing laws regulating firearms and best practices for firearm storage and safety.



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This legislative report details the progress since inception of the NC S.A.F.E. (Secure All Firearms Effectively) campaign, which is North Carolina's statewide initiative designed to raise awareness of the importance of safe firearm storage and to distribute cable gun locks.

Data make the case clear that there is an urgent need for North Carolinians to safely secure their firearms to decrease childhood deaths, decrease firearm thefts, and increase the safety of homes and communities. In 2020, the youth (infant to 17) firearm mortality rate in North Carolina, which includes homicides, suicides, and unintentional deaths, was 4.7 deaths per 100,000 youth deaths, while the previous year it was only 2.4 deaths per 100,000 youth deaths. In FY 20-21, the top offense in relation to firearms was possession of a handgun by a minor, with 591 offenses recorded. There were 526 offenses of larceny of a firearm and 379 offenses of possession of a stolen firearm. Throughout all 100 counties there was a total of 3,552 firearm related offenses, accounting for 14% of the 25,508 total offenses in FY 20-21. In FY 19-20, firearm offenses only accounted for 8%.

Background

Development of the campaign that became NC S.A.F.E. began in fall 2022, when state carryover funds were made available to advertise an RFP for development of an educational campaign highlighting the importance of secure storage of firearms. In February 2023, North Carolina Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (NCDJJD) hired a vendor to create and implement a marketing campaign focused on delivering a general message tailored to gun owners regarding the importance of secure storage of firearms. The campaign launched in May 2023, followed quickly by the first Week of Action in early June 2023, to elevate the message further. NC S.A.F.E. aspires to educate gun owners about the need for safe firearm storage and provide resources and best practices for firearm storage and safety. NC S.A.F.E. is a nonpartisan project and is not associated with any advocacy-based initiatives related to gun laws or regulations.

The campaign will include an evaluation of the initiative aimed at demonstrating behavior changes associated with exposure to NC S.A.F.E. An RFQ (request for quote) has been submitted for this work from RTI, an external research partner possessing expertise in this type of evaluation and firearm violence research. The evaluation will encompass both process and outcome assessments, including an efficacy analysis of long-term behavior changes linked to the campaign. This evaluation will begin following final approval of RTI's RFQ response through the Division of Purchase and Contract in the NC Department of Administration.



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Funding/Campaign Sustainability

State carryover funds were made available in fall 2022 to hire a vendor to develop and implement a firearm safe storage campaign. In February 2023, a contract in the amount of \$1,084,121.50 was awarded to Reingold, a marketing vendor out of Virginia, for these purposes. These funds were required to be expended by June 30, 2023, and the money necessary to create and implement the campaign was expended within that timeframe. Additionally, Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) put forth another \$400,000 in state funding between May and August 2023 to increase the scope of the media buy and to purchase supplementary outreach, educational, and promotional materials.

In November 2023, Byrne State Crisis Intervention Program (SCIP) funds (\$1,499,703.29) were awarded to DPS/JJDP to provide for a second phase of NC S.A.F.E., since state funding was not allocated by the General Assembly in connection with General Statute §2023-8, Section 3. This funding expires in February 2025; however, funding will be depleted at the end of December 2024. A second round of SCIP funds (\$500,000) were awarded to JJDP in August 2024, for the express purpose of funding a “NC S.A.F.E. Educational Campaign” tailored toward parents of school-aged children, with information to be disseminated to schools with the assistance of the NC Department of Public Instruction. These focused SCIP funds are scheduled to be depleted by June 2025.

To continue this campaign past February 2025 additional funds in the amount of **\$2,459,884 (R)** are needed to ensure that the campaign messaging is continually reinforced with North Carolina’s gun owners, to create behavior change, and to save lives.

Development of Campaign Website/Toolkit (N.C.G.S. §2023-8, Section 3, (b) (i-ii))

The campaign website, ncsafe.org, launched in May 2023. The main objectives of the website were to build awareness of safe firearms storage strategies, measured by impressions (the number of times an ad is displayed on a user’s screen); and to generate website traffic, measured by clicks. From May 2023-January 2024, the NC S.A.F.E. website garnered 82.56 million impressions and a total of 152,492 website visits.

Paid media campaigns launched across programmatic display, Meta (Facebook and Instagram), YouTube, connected TV (CTV), Nextdoor, Google Search, digital out-of-home, radio, and DMV screens. Bus wraps and ads were also developed to help increase overall campaign awareness. In addition to these paid efforts, the campaign developed and distributed a public service announcement (PSA) across the state.

Social media channels saw the largest share of follower growth occur in the weeks leading up to and during the Week of Action in 2023 and 2024. NC S.A.F.E. social media platforms provide an opportunity to connect with other organizations and supporters throughout the state following the campaign launch and served as the main outlet for new content and messaging. During the initiative’s first year alone, NC S.A.F.E. published 231 posts on its social media platforms, receiving 114,111 impressions, 1,866 video views, and 4,314 engagements.



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In addition to offering simple, practical advice for responsible gun owners, the NC S.A.F.E. initiative website (ncsafe.org) provides a dedicated section called "[Safe Storage 101](#)." This section goes beyond basic tips and dives deeper, offering five specific methods (gun safe, lockbox, gun case, cable lock, trigger lock) to securely lock away your firearms. By following these methods and utilizing the additional resources available on the NC S.A.F.E. website, gun owners can significantly enhance the safety of their home and community.

Additionally, NC S.A.F.E. partnered with the North Carolina State Highway Patrol to create a video demonstrating safe firearm and ammunition storage techniques. Sgt. Andrew Ahlmark of the Patrol's Firearms Training Division provides expert instruction on securing various types of firearms. This informative video is available on both ncsafe.org in the Safe Storage 101 section and on the site's [YouTube page](#).

The ncsafe.org website includes [downloadable/printable flyers](#) focused on safe storage of firearms in both English/Spanish. The site also contains an interactive [safe firearm storage map](#). The map was created by Appalachian State University Professor John Paul Jameson, Ph.D., to help North Carolinians identify local options for temporary, voluntary firearm storage. Out-of-home firearm storage is especially helpful when someone in the household is experiencing a mental health crisis or is at risk for suicide. Firearm owners may also choose to temporarily store firearms outside their homes at other times, such as when traveling or when children are visiting. NCDPS manages and updates this map as new locations are identified.

Parents have an important role to play when it comes to safe firearm storage, which is why a campaign focused on parents of school-aged children is extremely important. According to a 2021 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System survey, 42% of North Carolina adults have a firearm in or around their home, nearly half of firearms are stored loaded, and a quarter are stored both unlocked and loaded. Nearly 30% of North Carolina high school students reported it would take them less than an hour to get, and be ready to fire, a loaded gun without a parent or other adult's permission.

Safe storage is also shown to prevent suicide and school shootings. A 2019 study in JAMA Pediatrics estimated that up to 32% of youth firearm deaths by suicide and unintentional firearm injury could be prevented through safe storage of firearms in homes with youths.

According to the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, an estimated 82% of adolescent firearm suicides involve a gun belonging to a family member, and 80% of school shooters under 18 access a firearm from their own home or that of a relative or friend.

The website contains downloadable/printable flyers targeted for parents specifically in both English/Spanish.

- [Safe and Secure: A Parents Guide to Firearm Storage](#) (Parent Flyer)
- [Make Every Play Date Safer](#) (Parent Conversation Flyer)
- [Check Your Safety: A Safe Firearm Storage Checklist](#) (Safe Storage Checklist)
- [Safe Firearm Storage: You Have Options](#) (Safe Storage Options)



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Schools and other education-related entities play an important role in this conversation to provide parents with educational materials and resources they need to safely secure their firearms and talk about the topic with other parents. As part of the NC S.A.F.E. campaign, one-on-one interviews were conducted with gun owners who are also parents, and several of them indicated that they had not considered gun theft or suicide as a potential threat to their children or community when deciding how to store their firearms.

To ensure that this important message on firearm safe storage resonates with and reaches the identified subpopulation, NC S.A.F.E. has developed a campaign focused on delivery of secure storage messaging to parents of school-aged children via local school systems. The Department of Public Safety amended its contract with the Governors Crime Commission (GCC) to add \$500,000 in SCIP moneys to fund this new initiative (NC S.A.F.E. in Schools), to be launched during the 2024-2025 school year. The proposed activities will tailor education toward parents of school aged children by:

- A. Encouraging parents of school-aged children who are gun owners to safely store their firearms.
- B. Encouraging all parents to normalize the “safe firearm storage” conversation with other parents and take steps to protect their children and others in their community.

Distribution of Cable Gun Locks / Personal Vaults (N.C.G.S. §2023-8, Section 3, (b) (iii))

Since inception of NC S.A.F.E., more than 75,000 cable gun locks have been allocated/distributed to various entities, including law enforcement agencies, local firearm safety teams, local health departments, local suicide prevention teams, health care entities – including pediatricians, and the NC National Guard. In spring 2024, distribution of an additional 60,000 cable gun locks began. Since the start of the campaign, more than 800-gun vaults have been/are being distributed to local communities to raffle off during secure storage-related events. NC S.A.F.E. will continue to distribute gun locks and educational materials via Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (DJJDP) Community Programs regional offices, in additions to a diverse network of community partners including health care systems, law enforcement agencies, gun ranges, and community organizations.

NC S.A.F.E. offers free cable gun locks at every event in which it participates. Website visitors can email ncsafe@ncdps.gov to request a free gun lock as well. An online storefront is under development that will allow partner organizations to request NC S.A.F.E. branded materials directly. This will also help the NC S.A.F.E. campaign efficiently manage the inventory of gun locks and promotional items and be able to quickly ship them out or have them picked up directly from the vendor’s Durham, NC warehouse. Direct delivery to individual citizens would require additional study.

Additional gun locks and new campaign materials, including video ads and educational materials, were delivered in May 2024 to four regional DJJDP Community Programs offices for use by community organizations and events statewide.

NC S.A.F.E. Large Gun Lock Distribution Timeline

- August 2023: Six subrecipients funded by the Comprehensive Suicide Prevention grant reported distributing 3,445 gunlocks in 10 project counties.



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- Nov 2023: Byrne State Crisis Intervention Program (SCIP) funds awarded to DPS/Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) for second phase of NC S.A.F.E. A second round of orders for gun locks and safes was placed with plans to distribute to local health departments, pediatricians, and other community groups.
- Jan 2024: Began distribution of more than 10,000-gun locks to local health departments.
- Jan 2024: Outreach to Pediatricians via NC Pediatric Society and the Coastal Pediatric Symposium; training on safe firearm storage counseling and distribution of 500 locks to 44 practices in 23 counties across NC.
- Feb 2024: Distribution of 2,700-gun locks to eight local Carolina Across 100 Suicide Prevention Teams covering 17 counties.
- April 2024: Distribution of 1,000-gun locks to the NC Council of Churches Peacemaking Summit.
- May 2024: Provided presentation on safe storage practices along with educational materials including over 200-gun locks to the SAFE Kids conference.
- June 2024: Received 620 personal gun vaults to be distributed to local communities to raffle off during secure storage events.
- July 2024: NC S.A.F.E. distributed more than 200-gun locks and SRO Specific flyers at the NC Association of School Resource Officers Conference in Concord, NC.
- August- December 2024: Continued distribution of gun locks through subrecipients funded by the Comprehensive Suicide Prevention grant and other community groups.
- September 2024: NC State University Football fan experience anticipated distribution of 1,000 - gun locks and educational material.

October 17-27: NC S.A.F.E. will be a vendor at the NC State Fair handing out free gun locks, raffling off gun safes, and providing educational materials. Projections indicate distribution of 10,000 gun locks throughout the fair to reach more than 350,000 interactions is likely.

State Firearm Safe Storage Laws (N.C.G.S. §2023-8, Section 3, (b) (iv))

The North Carolina law that concerns safe storage of firearms is [NC Gen Stat § 14-315.1 \(2023\)](#). This law is referred to as the NC Safe Storage Law and states:

§ 14-315.1. Storage of firearms to protect minors.

- (a) Any person who resides in the same premises as a minor, owns or possesses a firearm, and stores or leaves the firearm (i) in a condition that the firearm can be discharged and (ii) in a manner that the person knew or should have known that an unsupervised minor would be able to gain access to the firearm, is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor if a minor gains access to the firearm without the lawful permission of the minor's parents or a person having charge of the minor and the minor:
- (1) Possesses it in violation of G.S. 14-269.2(b);
 - (2) Exhibits it in a public place in a careless, angry, or threatening manner;
 - (3) Causes personal injury or death with it not in self-defense; or
 - (4) Uses it in the commission of a crime.



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(b) Nothing in this section shall prohibit a person from carrying a firearm on his or her body, or placed in such close proximity that it can be used as easily and quickly as if carried on the body.

(c) This section shall not apply if the minor obtained the firearm as a result of an unlawful entry by any person.

(d) "Minor" as used in this section means a person under 18 years of age who is not emancipated. (1993, c. 558, s. 2; 1994, Ex. Sess., c. 14, s. 11.)

NC S.A.F.E. promotes this law to the public by showcasing the importance of safe firearm storage, providing free gun locks, and educational materials statewide both online and in-person events. Additionally, the NC Safe Storage Law is a resource available on the website.

Links and Resources Related to Firearm Safe Storage (N.C.G.S. §2023-8, Section 3, (b) (v))

NC Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) efforts expanded the safe firearm storage initiative into a more comprehensive public health effort. By collaborating with local health departments, primary care providers, hospitals, and local firearm safety and suicide prevention teams, DPS distributes gun locks via DHHS local teams and promotes safe storage practices statewide to prevent firearm-related injuries. This comprehensive approach has expanded the campaign's impact, leading to partnerships with organizations dedicated to pediatric safety, domestic violence, and suicide prevention. The NC S.A.F.E. initiative continues to be co-branded with DHHS online and throughout events across the state.

NC S.A.F.E. is also extremely proud to partner with the NC Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC). One example of collaboration is the 46th Annual Youth Hunter Skills Education Tournament at the John Lentz Hunter Education Complex in Ellerbe, NC, in April 2024. The event attracted over 60 teams from across the state, providing an excellent opportunity to engage with young people. At this event, over 100-gun locks, flyers, and other NC S.A.F.E. promotional materials were distributed. Several participants were familiar with the initiative through NC S.A.F.E. advertising or social media posts. NCWRC displays NC S.A.F.E. educational flyers at its shooting ranges statewide and distributes gun locks at events.

This partnership has fostered relationships with numerous firearms instructors and hunting organizations/clubs across North Carolina. The NC S.A.F.E. initiative continues to be co-branded with NCWRC online and at events throughout the state.



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NC S.A.F.E. at the 2022 Hunter Skills Education Tournament



NC S.A.F.E. signage at Gun Firing Ranges

Access to Safe Firearm Storage Toolkit (N.C.G.S.2023-8, Section 3, (b) (vi))

The website boasts an easily accessible toolkit for community partners and visitors to launch firearm safe storage initiatives at the local level under the partner resources section of the website. Potential partners can choose amongst four (4) toolkits in either English/Spanish:

A. [Host a Presentation Toolkit](#)

This toolkit is designed to help partners host a successful presentation about safe firearm storage whether that presentation is in person or virtual.

B. [Join an Existing Event Toolkit](#)

This toolkit is designed to help partners spread awareness about safe firearm storage at events in your community. Reaching audiences at events they are already attending is a great way to engage them on the topic of safe firearm storage.

C. [Host a Stand-Alone Event Toolkit](#) This toolkit is designed to help you plan and execute an event on safe firearm storage at their own events.

D. [Media Toolkit](#)

This toolkit is designed to provide news media partners with pertinent information about NC S.A.F.E.

These toolkits include:

- Recommendations on what to consider in your planning efforts.
- A list of handouts and resources to distribute at the event.
- Ways to promote your event to the public.
- A link to a partner media toolkit to help you promote your event to local media.
- Talking points to guide conversations at the event.
- Links to PowerPoint presentations of varying lengths.

The 2023 campaign included ads on radio, Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) screens, digital out-of-home platforms (billboards, gas station pumps, bus wraps, etc.), and a public service announcement



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distributed across the state. Digital ad channels included Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Nextdoor, Google Search, programmatic display, and connected TV.

These impressions have led to several organic opportunities for churches, civic groups, neighborhood associations, and others to launch firearm safe storage initiatives at the local level.

Development of State Coordinated Outreach (N.C.G.S. §2023-8, Section 3, (c))

In its inaugural year of 2023, NC S.A.F.E. launched a marketing campaign focused on delivering a general message to gun owners regarding the importance of the secure storage of firearms. The current phase of the safe storage media campaign added messaging highlighting the importance of secure storage in preventing suicide, and on secure storage of firearms within vehicles. Since the start of the campaign, the state proclaimed individual weeks in June 2023 and 2024 as the NC S.A.F.E. Week of Action to raise awareness about the importance of safe gun storage. In 2024, community partners hosted more than 12 events across the state. Educational and promotional materials and branded gun locks with instructions were delivered at these and other events.

In spring 2024, DPS rolled out an NC S.A.F.E. training module to its employees through the state learning management system. This training module was made available to all state employees in late spring 2024.

NC S.A.F.E. developed a robust outreach strategy to disseminate its educational materials and toolkits. These strategies helped reach many different audiences, both directly and through partners in digital and in-person formats.

- I. **Outreach to Firearm Safety Teams and Juvenile Crime Prevention Councils:** Provide information and resources to Firearm Safety Teams (FST) and Juvenile Crime Prevention Councils (JCPCs) to help them share information about safe firearm storage with their communities during the Week of Action and beyond.
 - Conducted training on NC S.A.F.E. at JCPC meetings.
 - Provided templates so local organizations, including JCPCs and FSTs, can co-brand materials.
 - Provided an open line of communication through a centralized email address where these groups can share their “wins,” ask questions, and communicate leading up to and through the Week of Action.
 - Used a combination of virtual meetings and email outreach to communicate with the leaders of these groups and receive information about their actions and involvement.
- II. **Statewide and regional outreach:** Use tailored email and phone outreach to establish partnerships with key statewide and regional organizations, then customize offerings based on each partner’s needs. NC S.A.F.E. leveraged existing relationships and developed new relationships with statewide and regional organizations to help further the messaging of the initiative. Partners include:
 - Government organizations
 - Faith-based organizations

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- Statewide community organizations
- Education organizations
- Health care organizations
- Parent-focused organizations
- Outdoor and gun-focused organizations

III. **Local outreach:** Conducted email outreach to local organizations across the state to encourage them to share NC S.A.F.E. resources in their community. Partners include:

- Gun shops and gun organizations
- Community organizations
- Libraries
- School districts
- Places of worship
- Health clinics

IV. **Event participation planning:** Compiled a calendar of events taking place across the state at which NC S.A.F.E. should have a presence. To supplement local event attendance by Firearm Safety Teams and JCPCs, a calendar of events was created logging where NC S.A.F.E. should have a table or booth to distribute materials and talk to attendees. This allows for in-person connection with the target audience and allows engagement in conversations about safe firearm storage that can help inform future campaign activities.

The outreach leading up to Week of Action 2024 garnered 120 partners, with 125 partner wins (actions taken by partners to support the campaign i.e. host events, post on social media, etc.), and stretched across 68% of North Carolina counties. Partner wins included NC Department of Insurance Safe Kids NC speaking engagement and American Foundation for Suicide Prevention material distribution and sponsorships. These established partnerships serve as representatives for the NC S.A.F.E. program and offer invaluable support to newer collaborators.

Results



The outreach leading up to Week of Action garnered **120 partners**, with **125 partner wins**, and stretched across **68%** of North Carolina counties. Partner wins include NC Department of Insurance – Safe Kids speaking engagement and American Foundation for Suicide Prevention material distribution and sponsorships.



Partner Wins by Type





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- V. **Materials development:** Developed new materials to support partnership outreach and allow people to get involved at the individual level. NC S.A.F.E. developed resources that can be used by individuals who want to help spread the word about the safe firearm storage initiative even if they aren't part of an official organization. These resources will offer simple, actionable steps they can take to work toward a safer, more secure community. These resources may include:

- A social media profile image frame
- Social media cover photos
- Social media graphics that show individual support of the campaign and the Week of Action.
- A customizable letter encouraging schools and other organizations to distribute NC S.A.F.E. materials.
- Promotional items with an individual message such as "I support the NC S.A.F.E. Week of Action."

The Week of Action has emerged as a cornerstone initiative, driving momentum during the mid-year period, and propelling a series of summer events culminating in multiple National Night Out collaborations with law enforcement agencies statewide throughout August-October. The marketing company empowers partner organizations, key stakeholders, and media outlets with resources to amplify the campaign message. In preparation for the Week of Action, NC S.A.F.E mobilized partners statewide to disseminate gun safety information. In 2024, over 12 community-led events across North Carolina delivered essential firearm safety education.

Attendees received informational materials and branded gun locks. Since the Week of Action, social media engagement and sharing of safe firearm storage information have surged. Community events have demonstrated effectiveness in generating media attention and fostering strong partnerships. Leveraging established relationships with local Juvenile Crime Prevention Council (JCPC) Councils and community partners, NC S.A.F.E. has successfully expanded its outreach.