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TITLE: Modifying Negligent Driving Behavior Through Warning Letters

DATE: August 1969

AUTHOR(S): Robin S. McBride & Raymond C. Peck

REPORT NUMBER: 30

NTIS NUMBER: PB-187774

FUNDING SOURCE: Federal Highway Administration

PROTECT OBTECTIVE:

To investigate the relative impact of various types of warning letters on the subsequent driving record of negligent drivers. Levels of threat and intimacy were manipulated.

SUMMARY:

From the standpoint of collision reduction and cost-benefit, a warning-letter program was clearly supported by the study findings. The experimental low-threat letters and the DMV standard letter were more effective than the high-threat letters in reducing collision frequency, and all letters resulted in fewer collisions than for the no-letter control group. The findings did not support sending a short questionnaire with the warning letter. A reinforcement letter issued to drivers who had maintained "clean" records was effective only on those subjects who initially received the low threat/highly personal letter. Although the warning letters had some impact on subsequent convictions, the effect was smaller than with collisions and did not vary by type of letter.

To achieve a maximum amount of collision reduction, the data indicated that a low threat/low personal letter should be used for all female drivers and married male drivers under 30, whereas the standard letter should be used for all other drivers. However, it was recommended that a study be conducted to make sure that the present findings could be replicated before adopting a reinforcement letter program or using different letters for different age and sex groups.

IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

The department implemented the low threat/low intimacy letter based on this study. A subsequent study did not support the adoption of a reinforcement letter program.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Received the 1970 Metropolitan Life Award of Honor for Research in Accident Prevention.
Published in *Accident Analysis and Prevention*, 2(3), 1-28 1970.