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TITLE: An Evaluation of Probation-by-Mail as an Alternative to Mandatory Hearing Attendance for Negligent Operators

DATE: July 1979

AUTHOR(S): Beverly R. Sherman & Michael Ratz

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FUNDING SOURCE: Departmental Budget

PROTECT OBTECTIVE:

To evaluate the feasibility and traffic safety implications of placing negligent operators on probation by letter without the subjects being scheduled for a hearing.

SUMMARY:

Negligent operators eligible for an informal hearing were randomly assigned to either probation-by-mail ($n = 3,883$) or regular individual hearings ($n = 3,868$) after high-risk drivers had been screened out for normal contact ($n = 6,148$). A six-month follow-up of driving records indicated that there were no significant differences in the subsequent accident rates of the two randomly assigned groups, although drivers in the probation-by-mail group did have significantly more convictions, with a resultant increase in probation violator hearings. Those drivers who were screened out as being high risk and who therefore received the standard hearing did not differ significantly from nonhigh-risk drivers who received a hearing with regard to either subsequent accidents or convictions. A cost-benefit analysis indicated a .67 probability of a positive net financial impact for an implemented probation-by-mail program.

IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

This study and the no-action hearing study examined two logically complementary alternatives to the individual hearing and group meeting driver improvement programs. Because there were no clear-cut accident effect differences between the two experimental programs, and probation-by-mail resulted in a greater budgetary savings, the implementation of probation-by-mail was recommended. The program was implemented statewide in July 1979. In 1982, evidence of declining effectiveness led the department to restructure its post licensing control system.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

For related California DMV studies, see Marsh, Report #94; Peck and Healey, Report #155; and *A New Approach to Treatment and Control of the Negligent Operator* by the California Department of Motor Vehicles, Division of Drivers Licensing, 1981.