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TITLE: The Traffic Safety Impact of California's New Drunk Driving Law (AB 541)-An Evaluation of the First Nine Months of Experience

DATE: August 1983

AUTHOR(S): Raymond C. Peck

REPORT NUMBER: 87

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PROTECT OBTECTIVE:

To determine if the new drunk driving law (AB 541) had any impact on the incidence of alcohol-related traffic accidents.

SUMMARY:

This study examined the impact of AB 541 by comparing monthly accident trends before and after the bill's implementation (January 1982). Monthly counts of the following injury and fatal accident types were obtained from the CHP for January 1977 through September 1982: late-night accidents, daytime accidents, HBD accidents, non-HBD accidents, and late-night single-vehicle accidents involving male drivers. The rationale underlying the statistical analysis was that, if effective, AB 541 should have a significantly greater impact on alcohol-oriented accidents (e.g., HBD, late night, etc.) than on nonalcohol accidents (non-HBDs, day accidents, etc.). Using log-linear contingency table analyses, the study found significantly greater reductions in the following categories: HBD fatalities, HBD injuries, late-night injuries, and late-night single-vehicle injury accidents involving males. Reductions ranged from 7-12% and tended to decline toward the latter part of the 9-month post-AB 541 period. However, there was still evidence of a decline in HBD fatalities at the end of the 9-month period. It was, therefore, concluded that AB 541 resulted in a reduction in alcohol-involved accidents but that a longer-term follow-up was needed to establish the duration of the impact.

IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

A longer-range evaluation of the law's impact was in progress at the time of writing (see below).

SUPPLEMENT ARY INFORMATION:

See Tashima and Peck, Report #95 and Rogers and Schoenig, Report #123 for more current information.