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TITLE: The Effect of Renewal by Mail for Drivers with less than Four-Year-Clean Records (Final Report)

DATE: February 1989

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PROTECT OBTECTIVE:

To evaluate the traffic safety impact of allowing drivers with a two-year-clean record, but less than a four-year-clean record, to renew their licenses by mail.

SUMMARY:

Under a demonstration program authorized by the Legislature (SB 483, 1982), almost 500,000 drivers less than 70 years of age, whose driving records showed no entries for the two years preceding the date of expiration of their licenses, and who had no major convictions or fatal accidents (but could have other driving record entries) within the four years preceding this date, were randomly assigned to either a treatment or a control group. This subject selection process continued for one year, from October, 1982 to October, 1983. Treatment group members were allowed to renew their licenses by mail. Control group members were required to come to a field office and pass vision and knowledge tests in order to renew.

The driving records of treatment and control groups were monitored for a period of four years, in order to determine whether the treatment (which resulted in administrative savings) had an effect upon traffic accidents and convictions. During these 4 years, a normal license term in California, no significant overall difference in driving records was shown between the groups. However, significant detrimental program effects on accidents were noted for a relatively small subgroup of drivers who had experienced recent traffic violations or accidents which were not on their records at selection.

A recommendation to continue, but not expand the mail renewal program—either by relaxing eligibility criteria or by allowing more than the two successive mail renewals allowed at the time of the study—was made. In addition, because omission of renewal testing did not have an overall adverse traffic safety effect, it was recommended that research into methods of improving California's driver competency assessment process be undertaken.

IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Driver competency assessment research was begun, as recommended. It is currently a very active research area at DMV. The renewal-by-mail program was expanded to include drivers with two-year-clean records. (It was later expanded further to include drivers with one negligent operator point within the two years prior to license expiration, but this change has not been evaluated.)

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Published as Janke, M. K., Safety effects of relaxing California's clean-record requirement for driving license renewal by mail. *Accident Analysis & Prevention*, 22(4), 335-349, 1990.