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TITLE: An Evaluation of the Impact of a Warning Letter for First-Time DUI Offenders (Volume 6 of "An Evaluation of the California Drunk Driving Countermeasure System")

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PROTECT OBTECTIVE:

To develop, implement, and evaluate a package consisting of a warning letter and pamphlet suitable for the first-DUI offender.

SUMMARY:

In conducting this analysis, the California Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) sought to determine whether warning letters and informational materials could successfully augment other DUI countermeasure efforts, resulting in reductions in subsequent accident and DUI recidivism rates. In general, studies had indicated that warning letters do provide some reduction in accidents and convictions. Given their low cost and unobtrusiveness, it was hoped that these effects could be extended to DUI offenders, though it was acknowledged that such warning letters would constitute only a very small part of the countermeasure regimen for first DUI offenders.

Two issues were addressed in this analysis: 1) Frequency of mailing - is there a benefit to sending a second warning letter to reinforce the principles outlined in the first letter? 2) Type of warning letter - is there a benefit to "personalized" warning letters, as suggested by prior research?

Briefly, warning letters were found to provide no significant reduction in accidents or convictions for DUI offenders. Neither the frequency of mailing nor the type of warning letter appeared to make any difference. It was therefore recommended that none of the letters studied be implemented.

The report notes that the Department already used a DUI warning letter for certain drivers as part of its Negligent Operator Treatment System (NOTS). Since evaluation of the NOTS program is ongoing, it was recommended that the alcohol warning-letter portion of the program be discontinued, given that the NOTS evaluation system (NOTES) supported study findings.

IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Department did not adopt any of the letters evaluated in this study. On the other hand, evidence from NOTES Report #5 (Marsh) suggesting that alcohol warning letters were more effective than standard warning letters in reducing injury accidents. Subsequent NOTES reports did not consistently replicate this finding but the DUI letters were retained.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

See McBride and Peck, Report #30, Epperson and Harano, Report #45, and the series of NOTES reports for further information on DUI warning letters.