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EVALUATION OF TRAFFIC VIOLATORS SCHOOLS (TVS) VS TRAFFIC SURVIVAL SCHOOLS (TSS)

Final Report

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16. Abstract

Traffic violators in Arizona are permitted to retain their licenses by enrolling in "Traffic Survival School" (TSS) which attempts to develop the knowledge required to survive in the traffic environment. Based upon research showing that the deficiencies of persistent violators are more motivational than cognitive, an experimental "Traffic Violators School" (TVS) program was developed to encourage more lawful vehicle operation. Over a two-year period, some 35,126 persistent violators from two Arizona counties were assigned to the TVS and TSS. The violation experience of both groups was followed up over a 24-month period, and the accident experience for a 12-month period. The result was small but statistically significant differences in accident and violations favoring the TVS group over the 12 months following course assignment. No significant differences in violations were observed during the second 12-month period. The costs of administering the two programs were equal. The small differential benefit of the TVS coupled with the appropriateness of its content seemed to warrant its implementation Statewide.

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PREFACE

This report was prepared by Dr. A. James McKnight and Mr. A. Scott Tippetts of the National Public Services Research Institute. Mr. Joe Warren, of the Arizona Transportation Research Center, served as Contract Monitor. Mr. Kevin Halcik, Arizona Motor Vehicles Division, provided administration of Traffic Survival School (TSS) and Traffic Violators School (TVS). The work was carried out for the Arizona Department of Transportation in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration. Ms. Marcia W. Zior of NPSRI prepared and edited the manuscript of this report.

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INTRODUCTION

Chronic traffic violators, though only making up about 5% of the driving population, account for 10 to 15 percent of traffic accidents (Brezina, 1969; Burg, 1968; Campbell, 1958; Flowers et al., 1980; Harano, Peck & McBride, 1975; Harrington, 1971; Schuster & Guilford, 1964). In Arizona, drivers with three prior violations are twice as likely to have a subsequent violation or accident as are drivers with only one prior violation (McKnight, 1988).

Courses of driving instruction have long been used as a means of improving the safety of persistent traffic violators. A survey conducted by the authors of this report in 1988 disclosed that 43 of 51 States and the District of Columbia include some form of driving instruction in their series of driver improvement actions. In 23 jurisdictions, participation in such courses is mandatory, under the sentence of suspension, while in the remaining 19 States, satisfactory completion of a course is considered in the decision as to whether to reinstate the license of an offender. Struckman-Johnson (1989) reviewed some 65 driver improvement courses and discovered that, while the great majority of them led to a reduction in further traffic violations, the effect upon subsequent accidents was equivocal, some showing a reduction and some showing a gain.

The driver improvement course most commonly given to repeat traffic offenders under State driver improvement programs is the National Safety Council's "Defensive Driving Course" (DDC). The suitability of a "defensive" course for traffic offenders is certainly questionable. Clearly, the course was not designed for what is obviously an "offensive" group of drivers. It appears to have been applied to the offender population more because of its availability than its suitability.

The Defensive Driving Course, like most courses given to traffic violators, attempts primarily to inform drivers of safe driving practices. While most drivers can probably benefit from such information, research indicates that lack of information is not at the root of repeated traffic violations. As a group, traffic violators are as knowledgeable of safe driving practices as are other drivers (Miller & Dimling, 1969; McKnight and Greene, 1976). A review of courses for traffic violators by Donelsen & Mayhew (1987) found that, among courses for traffic violators, those that addressed attitude and attempted to alter motivation were more effective in changing behavior than were courses that attempted to develop knowledge. As Koppa & Banning (1981) put it, "A driver improvement course may improve their knowledge, but motivation and attitudes are still influenced more by the perception of law enforcement or judicial surveillance than by educational techniques, at least as imparted by the particular training program used in (his) demonstration."

Traffic Survival School

In Arizona, drivers who qualify for driver improvement action by having accumulated more than 8 points in traffic violations are given the opportunity to attend a Traffic Survival School (TSS). As its name implies, the TSS focuses upon those knowledges that enable drivers to protect or defend themselves against the rigors of the highway traffic environment. As with the DDC, one can legitimately question the logical relevance of self-protective subject matter to a group of drivers whose distinguishing feature is the extent to which they have contributed to those rigors. If anyone's "survival" is of concern, it should be those who must share the road with traffic violators.

One might defend teaching subject matter that is unrelated to current needs of a traffic violator if it were shown to benefit *all* drivers, regardless of prior driving record. Under such circumstances, the only role that prior violations would play would be to provide a means of requiring at least one subpopulation of drivers to take a course that will benefit them where they would otherwise not do so. What undermines this justification for giving survival training to traffic offenders is the lack of evidence that driver improvement instruction is beneficial to any category of driver. Moreover, Donelson & Mayhew's findings would suggest that a program that attempted to motivate violators to operate lawfully and safely would be more effective than one which only attempted to communicate safe driving practices.

Traffic Violator School

In 1988, the Arizona Transportation Research Center contracted with the National Public Services Research Institute (NPSRI) to undertake a study of its driver improvement program, including the educational component of this program. Recognizing both the logical and empirical questions surrounding the educational program in use at that time, the Traffic Survival School, NPSRI undertook the development of a course geared specifically to the needs of traffic offenders. The development and content of this course are fully detailed in the final report of that project[1].

The "Traffic Violator School" course, developed under the project cited, has as its objective "to reduce the likelihood of further traffic violations among frequent traffic offenders." The objective is certainly a logical one since it is traffic violations that gave rise to the course in the first place. While the Traffic Violators School (TVS) certainly

[1] McKnight, A.J. "Research and Development of a Valid Driver Improvement Index and Associated Driver Educational Program." Final Report. Performed by National Public Services Research Institute under contract to the Arizona Department of Transportation. June 30, 1988.

seeks to assure safety and survival, it is the welfare of the public rather than simply the traffic offender that is of concern. Since this is also the objective of traffic laws, a course that seeks to reduce violations of the law might be expected to reduce accidents as well as further violations.

Key elements of the TVS may be summarized as follows:

Structure — The structure of the TVS is specifically oriented toward achieving the objective described, and involves the following four major units:

Problem Recognition — A review of violator's driving record leading to recognition that previous behavior is deviant, dangerous, and unacceptable.

Problem Definition — Examining conditions leading to previous unacceptable behavior, the impact of such behavior upon the safety and rights of others, and the consequences of its continuation.

Problem Correction — A review of traffic laws, the reasons behind them, and practical steps to avoid conditions encouraging unlawful behavior.

Problem Resolution — Discussion leading to personal strategies for achieving behavior change.

Instructional Method — The TVS employs a highly interactive approach rather than lecture, using discussions to help violators recognize their own deficiencies and those of others.

Administration — The TVS introduces several changes in the way driver improvement programs in Arizona are taught, including:

Session Length — Limited to two hours in length with no more than one session per day, except where participants must travel great differences.

Class Size — Limited to 25 participants per class.

Achievement — Administration of a 25-item test that violators must pass in order to retain their driver licenses.

Monitoring — The administration of the TVS required close monitoring by the Arizona Motor Vehicles Division to assure compliance with the established curriculum

and avoid the liberties that the study revealed were taken with the Traffic Survival School curriculum.

Evaluation Objective

The objective of the evaluation described in this report was primarily to assess the effectiveness of the Arizona Traffic Violators School (TVS) in achieving its objective of reducing further traffic offenses among those assigned at the course, and secondarily, to determine what attainment of this objective might have upon reduction of accidents.

METHODOLOGY

The effectiveness of the Traffic Violators School (TVS) in reducing violations and accidents was evaluated through an experiment in which Arizona traffic offenders were assigned, at random, to either the regular Traffic Survival School (TSS) or the newly-developed Traffic Violators School (TVS), and the subsequent traffic violations and accidents of the two groups compared.

Courses

The two courses compared were the Traffic Survival School (TSS) and Traffic Violators School (TVS). Key features of both programs have been described. What is truly evaluated, however, is not the two specific courses but two approaches to instruction of traffic offenders. Being taught under a State driver improvement program, both courses seek to improve performance. The approach taken by the TSS attempts to improve knowledge of those driving practices that are essential for survival on the road. The TVS, on the other hand, seeks primarily to motivate offenders to comply with traffic laws by explaining the reasons for such laws and the consequences of continued violation.

The evaluation was limited for comparison between the two forms of driver improvement instruction; it did not attempt to compare either of them with the absence of any instruction at all. The evaluation addressed only the relative merits of two approaches to driver improvement instruction, not the value of instruction itself.

Evaluation Measures

The relative effectiveness of the two instructional approaches was evaluated by comparing the violation records of traffic offenders assigned to the two courses over the 12-month and 24-month periods following their assignment. Only moving violations were counted. Non-moving violations present almost no risk to the driving public and are not included among the violations leading to driver improvement action.

Accidents were also employed as an effectiveness criterion. While the immediate objective of driver improvement action is to prevent recidivism in the unlawful behavior leading to such action, the reason for enacting and enforcing traffic laws is to prevent accidents. Just as accident prevention represents the ultimate goal of driver improvement instruction, so too does it provide criterion for evaluating the relative effectiveness of the two courses under evaluation. Accident data were available only for 12 months following assignment to the course.

Study Parameters

The courses of instruction under evaluation (TSS vs TVS) and the two evaluation measures (violations and accidents) represent, respectively, the independent and dependent variables under study. Any differences in the subsequent accident violation records of offenders assigned to the two improvement courses should reflect the differential effectiveness of the courses — provided that the two groups of offenders were equal with respect to any other variables that might influence the subsequent driving records. Such equality was presumably achieved by assigning members at random to the two alternative instructional programs. However, collection of data relative to any outside variables capable of affecting subsequent driving record would be useful in (1) assuring that the random assignment process did indeed yield equivalent groups (2) allowing any variation in violations or accidents due to such variables to be statistically removed from the analysis, thus yielding a more powerful comparison.

Two variables known to influence the subsequent accident and violation records of traffic offenders is the number of prior accidents and violations. These two variables were therefore included in the evaluation as study parameters. Of the two, *prior violations* exert the more potent effect, primarily because of the extent to which the subjects of driver improvement action differ with respect to prior violations. One might think that any group created on the basis of traffic violations would be relatively homogeneous with respect to them. However, offenders are selected for improvement action on the basis of "points" rather than number of violations, even though the latter is more highly correlated with subsequent driving records. The relatively smaller relationship between *prior accidents* and subsequent driving record reflects merely the relatively small number of drivers having accidents on their records over the three-year period for which a driving record was available at the time of their selection for driver improvement action.

An additional variable known to be related to recidivism is *gender*, with males more likely to evidence subsequent accidents and violations than are females. It should be noted that the relationship of subsequent driver record to gender and prior driving record does not apply any specific set of causative influences. The relationships could well be

mediated by amount of driving, that is those who drive the most have the largest number of prior and subsequent accidents and violations, as well as being predominantly male.

Finally, *age* was controlled as a study parameter on a per-driver basis. Younger drivers evidenced a higher rate of accidents and violations than do older, more experienced drivers.

Study Sample

The Traffic Violators School (TVS) was instituted in August of 1988 in Arizona's two most populous counties, Maricopa and Pima. Confining the evaluations to two counties was necessary to achieve the control necessary for a conclusive evaluation within available study resources. The jurisdictions selected provided the largest sample of traffic offenders possible in two counties.

While traffic offenders were randomly assigned to the TSS programs at the outset, it was not until January, 1989 that the number of TVS classes available equalled that of the continuing TSS program. The study sample was therefore confined to offenders randomly assigned to the two programs at the beginning of 1989. Nominally, all violators assigned to the two programs after the starting date indicated were eligible for inclusion in the evaluation sample. However, need for at least one year of follow up accident and violation data following program assignment, coupled with the fact that Arizona accident files were only complete through the year 1991, limited the sample to those violators assigned during the years 1989 and 1990.

It is important to note that the evaluation sample consisted of violators *randomly assigned* to the TVS and the TSS programs, not those actually enrolling in it or completing it. Such was necessary to preserve the randomness of the new evaluation groups. Of the violators assigned to the TSS and TVS programs, 51.1 and 53.4 percent respectively failed to complete the programs, that is they either never enrolled or quit after doing so. While it may seem improper to evaluate a program on large numbers of people who never completed them, the elimination of non-completions from the sample would have destroyed the random character of the two groups being compared.

Including the entire assigned samples within the evaluations means that whatever benefits one program might enjoy over another must be sufficiently great to evidence themselves just within the subsample completing the program. The obvious danger is that a real benefit might not manifest itself; the advantage is that whatever difference does appear between the two programs can be attributed to the characteristics of the programs themselves and not some extraneous circumstances that influenced who stuck with the course and who did not.

The TSS and TVS samples were created through a random assignment process. The assignment process was handled entirely by the Motor Vehicles Division by the Arizona Department of Transportation. The identification of the Arizona drivers eligible for driver improvement action is performed automatically through a program that assigns points for various categories of violation, totals them, and identifies those above the threshold for improvement action. Prior to the evaluation, those identified as eligible for driver improvement action were sent a notice apprising them of the need to complete the TSS satisfactorily in order to retain their license to drive. A list of accredited schools was provided and arrangements for enrollment handled entirely between the offenders and the schools of their choice. To accommodate the evaluation, violators identified as eligible for improvement action were randomly divided between TVS and TSS programs through an automated randomization process. The same automated process entered the assignment upon their driver record and prepared a notification telling them which course they were to attend.

Evaluation Procedures

Within the two counties serving as sites for the evaluation, schools administering the TSS were invited to administer the TVS as well. They were notified that only those schools giving both programs would be eligible to receive traffic violators under the Arizona driver improvement program (they could still offer courses under court referral systems having nothing to do with the State driver improvement program). Having the same schools teach both courses was viewed as necessary to confine differences in instruction to the courses themselves and not characteristics of the schools giving them. All of the schools then giving the TSS in the selected counties agreed to teach the TVS as well as the TSS.

A two-day instructor preparation program was conducted to enable schools to administer the TVS program. Separate programs were conducted at each site. Participating in the program were both those currently teaching the TSS and those responsible for teacher preparation. Since the evaluation would take place over a two-year period (indeed, the TVS was viewed as a permanent addition to the driver improvement curriculum), schools needed the capability to conduct their own instructor preparation in order to replace the instructors as necessary.

The first day of the instructor preparation program was devoted to a review of lesson plans and published materials, including both visual aids and audiovisual presentations. The second day was devoted to practice teaching, in which the prospective instructors took turns teaching segments of the course. The teacher preparation program was taught by Mr. Charles Butler of the American Automobile Association, whose qualifications include several years experience in teacher preparation for the AAA Driver Improvement

Course. The audiovisual materials used in the course were drawn primarily from those used in the AAA course, considerably revised to meet the needs of the TVS.

A condition for a school's participation in the evaluation was agreement to teach the TVS as scheduled by MVD and in accordance with the lesson plans provided. Schools were notified in advance that, as a quality control measure, they would be visited periodically on a random, unannounced basis to assure their adherence to course requirements. Classes were indeed spot checked by a representative of MVD throughout the evaluation effort.

Data Reduction and Analysis

Data Reduction

The data were contained in two files. The driver file provided information on age, gender, school assignment, county, and moving violations (both prior and subsequent to the school assignment). The accident file provided dates and severity for accidents. Normally matching two such files would be a simple procedure, given that both contain an index variable such as drivers license number, which is used as a matching "key". In Arizona however, a person often receives a new drivers license number when a license is renewed or reinstated. This multiplied the effort required to match accidents to the driver file.

Additionally, the driver file contains 4 record types in an hierarchical structure, which needed to be converted to a single relational record for each subject. The accident file, though not hierarchical, also could contain multiple records for the same driver, since each record held only one accident. Again, multiple accident records for the same person were often indexed under different drivers license numbers. The task of converting multiple records into a single record for each driver required extensive programming. Once the two files were matched and converted to a relational or "horizontal" structure, it became possible to calculate prior and subsequent accidents and violations, given different exposure periods before and after the school assignment date.

Once the data were matched and restructured, a number of complications became apparent. Some drivers had received two or more school assignments during the study period, often with both Violator School and Survival School assignments. Because it would be impossible to attribute subsequent driving history to a particular assignment in these cases, these drivers were excluded from the sample. The sample was further limited to include only those assigned in Pima and Maricopa counties, during the two-year period 1989-90, for reasons discussed earlier.

As a check for randomization of school assignment, the two groups were tested for comparability in terms of age, gender distribution, prior accidents, and prior moving violations. This was tested using analysis of variance, including county as an additional factor. While the accident file only allowed for accidents to be computed for the twelve months immediately preceding the school assignment, prior moving violations were computed for twelve, twenty-four, and thirty-six months.

To test for differences in outcome (accidents and moving violations) between the two schools, analysis of variance is appropriate, including county and completion as additional factors, resulting in a 2 x 2 x 2 design. Gender was also included in initial analysis, but was found to have no interactions with any other factor, so it was included as dichotomous covariate with age and priors. Although the groups do not differ on any of these other factors or covariates, the inclusion of these other variables helps to reduce the residual variance, due to their correlation with the outcome measures. In addition to prior accidents, 24-month prior moving violations also was a significant predictor of subsequent accidents.

RESULTS

A total of 48,485 traffic violators were given the opportunity to attend driver improvement courses Statewide during the two-year period covered by the evaluation described in this report with three-quarters of these in the two counties under evaluation. Subjects assigned more than once to either of these programs were excluded, leaving 35,126 subjects assigned to a single school in Pima and Maricopa counties. This section will describe the characteristics of the final evaluation sample, recidivism and accident rates for the TVS and TSS subsamples.

Sample Characteristics

Characteristics of the final evaluation sample are summarized in Table 1

Table 1
Characteristics of the TSS and TVS Samples

Group	Totals Assigned	Percent Completing	Mean Prior Violations (12 Months)	Mean Prior Accidents (12 Months)	Percent Males	Mean Age
TSS	18,378	48.9	1.588	0.100	82.9	31.0
TVS	16,748	46.6	1.601	0.104	83.5	31.0

It appears that the randomization process was effective in creating two highly similar samples of drivers. Differences between the TVS and TSS assignees with respect to prior violations and accidents, as well as gender distribution, are very close and well within normal sampling variation. The small difference in relative numbers of violators assigned to the alternative courses is the result of a step in the randomization process that made the odds of being assigned to the TSS slightly greater than being assigned to TVS. However the randomness of assignment was not affected and, as Table 1 shows, the inequality of numbers did not bias the outcome.

While the TVS and TSS groups were equal with respect to circumstances prior to their assignment, they differed significantly with respect to completion rate after assignment ($p < .001$). The difference in completion rates is a result of the differences in maximum session lengths noted earlier; the TVS was limited up to two hours at a time, while the TSS could be taught in one day if the clientele desired. The result was a higher drop out rate among the TVS assignees.

Comparison of Violation Rates

The violation rates compiled by drivers randomly assigned to TSS and TVS programs over the 12 months following assignment are shown in Table 2. At both of the evaluation sites, those assigned to the TVS had fewer subsequent violations than those assigned to the TSS. The differences across the two sites is statistically significant ($t = 1.88$, $p < .05$). Across the two counties, the difference averages (.340 - .323 =) 17 violations in 1,000 offenders. Against a baseline of .340 violations per offender, this represents a 5% decline. The difference in violation rates between the two counties (.338 vs .324) falls short of statistical significance ($t = 1.62$, $p > .05$).

Table 2
Number of Violations by Course and County

Course	County		
	Maricopa	Pima	Total
TSS	.346	.333	.340
TVS	.331	.315	.323
TOTAL	.338	.324	

Violation records of offenders in the two courses were small and statistically nonsignificant over the second 12-month period ($t = 1.01$, $p = .5$).

Accident Comparisons

The injury accident rate for offenders assigned to each school over the year following their assignment appears in Table 3. Here again, those assigned to the TVS evidence significantly lower rates than those assigned to the TSS ($t=2.14$, $p=<.050$). The overall difference was (.024 - .020=) 4 accidents in 1,000 offenders. Against the baseline this represents a 17% decline. The margin prevailed within each of the two counties. Again, the overall difference between the two counties was statistically significant ($t=2.75$, $p<.010$).

Table 3
Accidents by Course and County

COURSE	County		
	Maricopa	Pima	Total
TSS	.021	.026	.024
TVS	.017	.022	.020
TOTAL	.024	.019	

Course Completion

As noted previously, better than half of the offenders assigned to the two instructional programs failed to follow through and complete eight courses to which they were assigned. In the majority of cases, they never even enrolled. Under Arizona law, failure to enroll in a course within 30 days after notification, or failure to complete the course successfully within 120 days after assignment, results in a 6-month license suspension. Table 4 displays the accident and violation rates for offenders completing and not completing the assigned instruction.

Table 4
Violations and Accidents by Course and Completion

COURSE	Accidents		Violations	
	Not Completed	Completed	Not Completed	Completed
TSS	.015	.033	.258	.428
TVS	.013	.027	.261	.392

It is apparent from the table that, among the offenders assigned to each school, those failing to complete the course had better subsequent accident and violation records than

those who did complete the assigned course. The difference is highly significant for both accidents ($F=64.39$, $p<.001$) and for violations ($F=150.13$, $p<.001$). One explanation for these seemingly paradoxical results lies in the fact that those failing to complete instruction had their licenses suspended for 120 days and were not, therefore, legally permitted to drive for a major portion of the followup period. However, it is not the whole answer since those failing to complete the course still had a third fewer violations during the second year following school assignment, after their driving privileges had been restored ($F=212.10$, $p<.001$). This outcome suggests that license suspension had a greater deterrent value in preventing future violations than did participation in a traffic school course (accident data were not as yet available.)

A third contributor to the differences between those completing and those not completing the course may be characteristics of the populations involved. Those who failed to complete the course had 15 - 19% fewer violations ($F=460.62$, $p<.001$) and 13 - 23% fewer accidents ($F=36.80$, $p<.001$) during the year *prior* to assignment than those completing it. This is a marked reversal of findings elsewhere showing generally better prior records for drivers electing to participate in school programs.

It is noteworthy that the offenders completing TVS had lower accident and violation rates than their TSS counterparts. The differences are somewhat larger than those reported for the groups as originally assigned, 36 violations and 6 accidents in each 1,000 students. Certainly, the benefits of the TVS over TSS in the groups as assigned were not due to the differences in completion rate.

Taken together, the results suggest that all three conditions contribute to the better driving records of violators who fail to complete school assignments: slightly less driving to begin with, the immediate effect of license suspension, and the long-term deterrent effect of having been suspended.

DISCUSSION

The Traffic Violators School appears to have met its overall objective of yielding lower recidivism rates among traffic offenders referred to driver improvement courses than did the Traffic Survivors School. The lower rate of moving violations among those assigned to the TVS seems to have been accompanied by a reduction in accidents. Nothing in the results reveals the form of the relationship between violations and accidents, that is, whether driving within the law and having fewer violations resulted in fewer accidents, or whether safer driving and having fewer accidents led to fewer citations for traffic violations.

The most impressive statistic did not relate to the differences between courses, but rather to the differences between offenders completing and not completing their assigned courses. These differences dwarfed those between the two courses themselves. That offenders failing to complete an assigned course compiled more favorable subsequent driving records is attributable in part to the fact that their licenses were suspended for a substantial portion of the 12-month followup period. However, the fact that they also had better records prior to and after their suspension may mean that drivers who are willing to accept license suspension rather than attend a traffic school are those who drive less and therefore have lower exposure to traffic violations and accidents to begin with.

Offering instruction as an alternative to suspension reflects the expectation that the additional accident and violation exposure that goes with allowing offenders to retain their licenses will be offset by safer driving as a result of instruction. The results of this evaluation show that expectation to be unfulfilled. Those who did not enroll in, or did not complete, their assigned courses had about half as many accidents and violations as those completing the courses. The lower accident and violation rates of TVS assignees is not due to their lower enrollment or completion rate; even among assignees completing the two courses, TVS graduates had lower accident and violation rates than did TSS graduates.

The overall benefit of the TSS was small — only 17 violations and 4 accidents in 1,000 assignees. Among those completing the program, the differences were only slightly larger — 36 violations and 6 accidents in 1,000 completions. However, since it costs no more to administer the TVS than to administer the TSS, any reduction in accidents and violations is acceptable. The beneficial effects of the TVS, coupled with the greater appropriateness of its subject matter to a population of traffic violators, makes it a suitable program for implementation on a Statewide basis.

The purpose of the evaluation described in this report was to compare the effectiveness of the Traffic Violators School against that of Traffic Survival School. It was not intended to assess the overall effectiveness of instruction as an approach to the improvement of traffic offenders. However, the fact that only a minority of offenders offered the opportunity to enroll in an instructional program actually do so, coupled with the low accident and violation rates of those who prefer to accept license suspension rather than enroll, is reason to examine the suitability of instruction as a means of improving the driving record of frequent traffic offenders.

Such a reexamination would not necessarily lead to the discontinuation of instructional programs. It may well be that in suspending the licenses of drivers having only 8 points on their records, without offering some alternative, would be publicly unacceptable.

Under such circumstances, programs such as the TSS and TVS would be of benefit, not only because of the instruction they provide, but rather because they offer a publicly acceptable mechanism for suspending licenses and therefore curtailing the exposure of offenders to accidents and violations. However, programs that deliver their primary benefit in such a back-handed way clearly deserve scrutiny.

Two other aspects of the Arizona Driver Improvement Program also warrant scrutiny. Traffic courts in Arizona frequently offer traffic violators the opportunity to attend a course similar to the traffic survival school or the traffic violators school as an alternative to having their offense reported to the motor vehicles division and posted to their driving record. Because of this practice, many drivers have committed more offenses than their records indicate, and many have previously attended some sort of traffic school. Should such persistent violators be offered the chance to attend another traffic school?

Also, more than half of the violators eligible for traffic school have gained that eligibility primarily through a drunk driving (DWI) conviction. The problem they face — mixing drinking with driving — is barely addressed in either of the two courses being evaluated. At the time the driver improvement study giving rise to this effort was completed, plans to offer a separate course for DWI first-offenders have been formulated by the Health Department. Since these plans have not come to fruition, a division of courses within the MVD driver improvement structure — a traffic school vs a DWI course — merits consideration.

Summary

Among persistent traffic violators, a course designed to reduce further traffic violations (Traffic Violators School) resulted in a slightly lower subsequent accident and violation rate than one that focuses upon survival in traffic (Traffic Survival School). While the differences between courses were small, they were statistically significant. However, the largest differences observed in the study were those between offenders who completed either of the two courses and those who failed to do so (either did not enroll, or enrolled and subsequently dropped out). Surprisingly, offenders who failed to complete either course had far lower accident and violation rates than those enrolling in and completing the course. Part of the difference may be due to the fact that those who did not complete instruction had their licenses suspended and drove less than those who completed a course and were legally permitted to drive. However, the fact that the non-completers also had fewer accidents and violations prior and following their suspension suggest that they may have been lower-mileage drivers to begin with. A reexamination of the entire driver improvement structure is suggested.

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