



Research Notes

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Study Recommends Changes to Oregon's Driver Improvement Program

The purpose of the Oregon Department of Transportation-Driver and Motor Vehicle Services (DMV) Driver Improvement Program (DIP) is to improve traffic safety by temporarily restricting unsafe drivers or removing them from Oregon's highways through the suspension process.

In January 2002 new driver improvement programs were implemented for adults and for drivers under 18, substantially changing the previous program which included advisory and warning letters, driver improvement interviews, and driver improvement classes. Changes resulted from a decision by the Oregon Attorney General to prohibit the use of highway funds for activities not *directly* restricting driving privileges, such as warning letters and interviews.

Driver improvement convictions (referred to as Type A convictions) are defined by administrative rule and do not include major traffic violations. Each conviction resulting from a single traffic stop constitutes a separate conviction.

Driver Penalties Under the Current Adult DIP

- Drivers will have their driving privileges restricted for 30 days between the hours of midnight and 5 a.m. when the following occurs: three Type A convictions; three preventable accidents; or a combination of the two, leading to a total of three incidents within an 18-month period.
- Drivers will have their driving privileges suspended for 30 days when the following occurs: four Type A convictions; four preventable accidents; or a combination of the two, leading to a total of four incidents within a 24-month period.

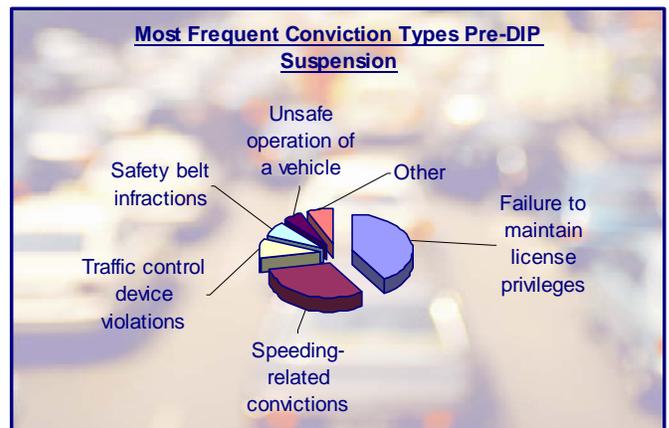
Research Study of the Driver Improvement Program

ODOT Research contracted with researchers at Portland State University to evaluate the effectiveness of the new adult DIP in improving safety. Oregon DMV requested the research in order to determine which areas of the program are effective and which areas need to be reevaluated and enhanced or eliminated entirely.

The study included: a literature review, a review of similar programs in other states, a comparison of the driving records of persons in the program to those in the general driving population, and a multivariate analysis of DIP drivers to gain a better understanding of the relationship between pre- and post-suspension driving performance.

The incidence of crashes, Type A convictions, and major traffic convictions for a sample of DIP subjects in the 18 month period prior to and following suspension, was compared to the incidence of these events among a sample of the general driving population. Of the persons involved in the DIP, the analysis revealed that at the point of suspension, the incidence of crash involvement per 100 DIP drivers was six times greater than that of the general driving public. In addition, the incidence of Type A convictions was 33 times higher, and the incidence of convictions for major traffic violations was about 15 times higher.

The majority of Type A convictions was related to failure to maintain license privileges, such as driving while suspended or operating a vehicle without a license



(41% of all convictions). Other most frequent conviction types included: speeding-related (31%), traffic control device violations (9%), safety belt-related violations (7%), and convictions related to unsafe operation of a vehicle (5%).

In the 18 months after suspension, crashes and Type A convictions declined substantially. The incidence of crashes among DIP subjects, relative to the general driving population, was estimated to have declined 56% from the pre-suspension level, while the decline in the relative incidence of Type A convictions was estimated at 68%. If regression-to-the-mean effects in the present study are of similar magnitude as in previous studies, this would indicate that an approximate decline of 11% in crashes and 13% in Type A convictions can be attributed to the effect of license suspension.

A multivariate analysis of the driving records of DIP drivers revealed the following: an increase in the number of prior convictions lead to an increase in the likelihood of subsequent convictions; an increase in prior crashes increases the likelihood of subsequent crashes, but not subsequent convictions; and an increase in the concentration of prior crashes and convictions is estimated to reduce the likelihood of subsequent convictions.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The research indicated that Oregon's adult Driver Improvement Program is having a positive safety impact. The researchers recommend the following improvements:

- Consider reinstating warning letters. The literature supports warning letters as a cost effective safety countermeasure. Additionally, warning letters may enhance the perceived fairness of the DIP.
- Consider assigning greater weight to crashes in the DIP point system. Future crash risk is significantly related to prior crashes, but not significantly influenced by prior convictions.
- Consider assigning a reduced weight to multiple driver improvement violations occurring at the same time. Future crash and conviction risk is lower when prior convictions are concentrated in fewer events.

Implementation Status

In March 2008 Oregon DMV held a stakeholders meeting to review potential changes to the adult Driver Improvement Program. The group that met included representatives from law enforcement, judicial services, and citizens who had been affected by the Driver Improvement Program. The research report was distributed to all participants prior to the meeting to provide background information and focus for the discussion.

The group established the following top three recommendations for change:

- Provide warning letters.
- Count multiple offenses in one event as one violation.
- Raise the threshold on the number of convictions it takes for a DIP suspension.

Other recommendations included:

- Assign a higher weight to crashes than to violations.
- Assign different weights to speeding violations depending on how much over the speed limit the driver was traveling.
- Weigh offenses according to the severity of the violation.
- Weigh crashes according to the severity of crash.

The timeline for implementing these recommendations has not been established. The implementation of changes will require a commitment of DMV staff resources to reprogram the automated systems used in administering the DIP.



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The final report for this project was published in April of 2007 and is available on the Research Unit web page:
http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/TD/TP_RES/docs/Reports/DMVDriver.pdf