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TITLE: The Traffic Safety Impact of TVS Citation Dismissals

DATE: November 1991

AUTHOR(S): Raymond C. Peck & Michael A. Gebers

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PROTECT OBJECTIVE:

To reassess the traffic safety impact of California's policy of dismissing and masking traffic citations in lieu of completing a DMV-licensed traffic violator school program.

SUMMARY:

This study identified and compared two large samples of drivers who had either: (1) completed a TVS (N = 38,131) or (2) been convicted of a traffic violation (N = 23,578) during the period 1987-1989. Prior to adjudication, the TVS group had characteristics that were predictive of a lower subsequent accident expectancy (lower prior accident rate, lower prior conviction rate, higher proportion of females and lower proportion of professional drivers). Despite this finding, the TVS group had significantly more accidents than did the conviction group in the subsequent one-year period. This difference (7.1%) increased to 10.2% when adjusted for the more favorable preexisting characteristics of the TVS group. At least part of the increase in subsequent accident rate was attributed to the loss in general and specific deterrence resulting from the nonconviction, masked status of the citation. It was estimated, for example, that 13,000 TVS graduates each year avoided DMV license control actions because the dismissals did not receive a point count pursuant to California's negligent operator law (CVC 12810). It was also found that the masked status of the TVS dismissal distorted the actuarial validity of the driver record in estimating a driver's future accident risk and in determining a driver's eligibility for "good driver" discounts pursuant to the state's Insurance Code. The report offers the following two recommendations for lessening the detrimental impact of TVS policy: (a) assign negligent-operator points to all TVS dismissals, and (b) unmask the original TVS dismissal whenever a driver receives a second TVS dismissal or subsequent traffic conviction within 18 months.

IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendations have not been implemented.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Related studies are Peck et al., Report #71; Gebers et al., Report #113; and Gebers, Report #147.