

7. Since achievement of "maturity" of driving behavior in terms of an accident rate that is not disproportionate seems to require several years of driving experience, an increased period of supervision or monitoring of the behavior of newly licensed young drivers, especially the males, appears eminently necessary. Such supervision and monitoring appears necessary not only on the basis of the present high losses to this group in accidents, but also as a means of reducing losses to other parts of the population. It should be noted that with the reduction of the voting age to 18 years, the apparent period of need for such supervision would extend into the years when persons are considered qualified to vote and thus to influence highway safety programs. Thus there is increased need for early education with respect to highway safety programs in the broadest sense.

8. The safety value of current programs of driver education, both in public schools and in commercial schools, is entirely unknown. Moreover, it may be quite impossible to conduct the definitive experiment because of the infeasibility of assigning subjects at random. However, there are some promising approaches to an approximation of the definitive experiment which might be explored.

XI. Recommendations

The Safety Board recommends that:

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1. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration re-examine its highway safety program efforts with a view to focusing certain programs more sharply on the 15 to 24 year-old group of drivers as a means of reducing excess losses in this group. This would pertain especially to driver licensing, driver education, driver improvement, alcohol safety action programs, and vehicle inspection. A much more thorough set of examinations for initial licensing of young drivers appears highly desirable. A diagnostic approach to driver preparation,

driver licensing, and driver improvement programs designed primarily for the new young driver appears highly justified by the disproportionate involvement and fatality rate of this age group.

5 8 2. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration develop new and/or supplemental efforts in their alcohol safety action programs specifically designed for the young drinking driver, beyond those now contemplated or in use.

5 9 3. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration explore means by which newly licensed young drivers can be provided with effective supervised driving practice for extended periods of time.

6 0 4. In addition to current efforts of National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to determine the safety value of driver education in the public schools and in the commercial schools, additional approaches, such as some of those noted in this report, be explored:

a. Possible replications of the Conger, Miller, and Rainey study in which the driving records of graduates of the course were compared with the records of drivers who wished to take driver education but, for a variety of reasons, could not, and with a third group who did not wish to and did not take driver education.

b. Assignment of school districts, at random, to provide driver education and not to provide driver education, and subsequent comparison of the driving records of the two groups. The opportunity for this disappears as more and more districts undertake driver education programs.

c. Assignment of students, at random into public driver education courses and into commercial driver training courses, and comparison of the driving records of the two groups; this is to be done to evaluate relative effectiveness of various components of the two systems.

d. The possible advantage in terms of cost and/or effectiveness of a diagnostic approach to driver education, i.e., a determination before entry into the course of individual students' needs in terms of information, attitudinal change, driving practice, or counseling. It does not follow that all students need the same treatment to achieve responsible and effective driving performance, since they do not bring the same capabilities and characteristics to the program.

e. Diagnostic approaches to driver improvement programs and to develop differential treatments especially designed to meet the needs of the new young driver.

f. As an aid to an understanding of the total social costs of high involvement of young drivers in fatal accidents, NHTSA conduct studies with a view to determining the excess losses suffered by other age groups as a result of the accident involvement rates of youthful drivers.

6 1 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration should explore means by which current examination procedures for initial license applicants, especially for the 15 to 24 age group, can be greatly improved.

6 1 Such improvement should follow in two directions: a) increased comprehensiveness of both the knowledge examination and the performance test, and b) structuring of the tests to serve the purpose of diagnosing the applicant's areas of insufficiency so that additional training, study, counseling, practice, or other measures might be recommended. Periodic re-examination of

new young drivers during the first few years of their experience might be profitably considered.

6 2 6. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration consider expanding the National Highway Traffic Safety Program Standard on Driver Licensing to provide for a 2-year period of probationary licensing for drivers under 21, during which time they would be expected to demonstrate the achievement of competence and maturity in driving. Such provisional licensing would facilitate suspension or revocation for cause and placement of mildly errant drivers into improvement programs before poor behavior and attitudes become habitual.

6 3 7. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration seek means to promote the coordination of the efforts of State agencies involved in safety programs affecting the young driver: public schools, police, courts, public health agencies, communications media, adult education programs, motor vehicle departments, and others.

6 4 8. The Youth Organizations United Toward Highway Safety (YOUTHHS), appointed as an Advisory Committee to NHTSA by the Secretary of Transportation, consider possible programs which will develop an appreciation on the part of individual youthful drivers of the major role which their driving behavior exerts in determining whether they will pass successfully through this high-risk period in life. The need for appreciation of this risk should be directed strongly to young male drivers, and should be coupled to the sense of increased public responsibility which ought to derive from possession of the right to vote.