

GRADUATED DRIVER LICENSING FOR YOUNG NOVICE DRIVERS UNITED STATES EXPERIENCE

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Motor vehicle crashes remain the leading cause of death for young people between the ages of 15 and 20. High crash rates among this age group are attributed to driving inexperience, lack of adequate driving skills, poor driving judgment and decision-making, risk taking behavior and immature personalities. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has long advocated that beginning young drivers not receive full driving privileges immediately. Under a graduated licensing system, beginning drivers improve their driving skills and acquire on-road experience under less risky conditions by being exposed to more difficult driving experiences gradually through three stages of licensing. Current usage calls the system "graduated" which includes a middle "provisional" license before full licensure. NHTSA believes that graduated licensing is a key component in addressing the over-representation of youths in traffic crashes and will continue to encourage states to implement such a system.

THE EARLY NHTSA GRADUATED LICENSING MODEL

Almost 20 years ago, NHTSA developed a model graduated licensing system to address the over-involvement of young drivers in traffic crashes. The NHTSA Report, *Development of a Model System for Provisional Licensing of Novice Drivers: Final Report (1977)*, recommended that beginning drivers, under the age of 18, proceed through a three stage licensing process, over a 24 month period, prior to obtaining an unrestricted license. The three stages involved a six month learner phase, a six month restricted phase and a 12 month provisional license phase before the unrestricted license. Under the learner's permit, adult supervision was required at all times, driver education was required and voluntary parent-supervised driving practice was recommended. The second, restricted stage recommended voluntary parent-supervised driving practice, allowed unsupervised driving during certain hours and included a youthful driver improvement program (e.g., group counseling, individual hearing, or additional restrictions on driving). The third, provisional stage required the driver to demonstrate six months of crash and conviction free driving before receiving the

unrestricted license. The youthful driver improvement program and certification of parent practice were also recommended under the third stage.

Maryland

In 1979, Maryland became the first state to implement and evaluate several features of the model graduated licensing system.

Under Maryland's system, at age 15 years 9 months a young person was eligible for a learner's permit. The learner's permit was issued upon successful completion of a written knowledge test and passing a vision test. The new driver was given the first of two parent participation handbooks designed to assist parents in continued training in basic driving skills. The permit holder could drive only when accompanied by a licensed driver 21 years of age or older. At age 16, having held a permit for a minimum of 14 days and having completed driver education, the new driver was eligible to take the road test for a provisional license. Under the provisional license the driver was subject to the following:

- No driving between 1:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m., unless accompanied by a licensed driver at least 21.
- Parent-supervised driving practice — a parent reported the number of hours of supervised practice they had provided the new driver. A second parent handbook was issued providing guidance in the training of more complex driving skills such as night driving, driving on freeways and inclement weather.
- Youthful driver improvement program — for a first offense, a driver was sent a safety pamphlet and had to report for a test on its contents.
- To be eligible for a regular license, a driver had to be at least 18 years old or accumulate six consecutive months of conviction-free driving.

Maryland's system reduced crashes by five percent and convictions by 10 percent for all 16 and 17 year old drivers (*Youth License Control Demonstration Project, 1983*).

In 1985, Maryland extended the period of conviction-free driving from six months to one year and

the nighttime restriction from midnight to 6:00 a.m. A follow up evaluation reported that the system was still producing a five percent reduction in daytime crashes and a 10 percent reduction in violations (*Provisional Driver License System for Follow-up Evaluation of Maryland Youth License Control Demonstration Project*, October 1990).

California and Oregon

California and Oregon also implemented and evaluated components of the model program graduated driver licensing system.

California's system became operational in October, 1983 and applied to drivers under 18 years of age. Major components of California's program included:

- Parent-teen driver handbook addressing driving problems and the use of safety belts both as drivers and passengers, and encouraging parent participation.
- Instruction permit period of at least one month.
- One week waiting period after failing the knowledge test. Two week waiting period after failure of the driving test.
- Parent's certification that the student received a minimum of 30 hours of additional driving practice supervised by a licensed adult at least age 25.
- Youthful driver improvement program (e.g., warning letter after first traffic conviction and a one-month license revocation allowing supervised driving after second conviction).

The California Department of Motor Vehicles reported that the licensing system reduced by 5.3 percent the rate of crashes involving 15-17 year old drivers (*The Traffic Safety Impact of Provisional Licensing*, 1988).

Oregon's graduated licensing program was implemented in October, 1989 and applied to all drivers younger than 18. Oregon's system included the following major components:

- Zero tolerance (.00) for under age 21.
- Pass a second level knowledge test on safe driving practices and a road test. If an applicant failed the road test, they had to wait 28 days before attempting again.
- Learner's permit was not required prior to initial road test, but was required, for at least a month, if an applicant failed the initial road test.
- Accelerated driver improvement actions on fewer convictions than for adults (warning letter for first traffic conviction, meeting with driver improvement counselor for second conviction, suspension for third conviction).

Oregon reported a 16 percent reduction in crashes for male drivers age 16-17. No significant differences were found for females (*The Effectiveness of Provisional Licensing in Oregon: An analysis of Traffic Safety Benefits, 1991*).

CURRENT NHTSA RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GRADUATED LICENSING

Based on information gained from the studies on graduated licensing and other traffic safety research, additional components have been added to the original model and the restricted and provisional stages have been combined to be known as the intermediate license stage. NHTSA recommends that beginning drivers, under the age of 18, proceed through a three-stage licensing process, over a minimum 18 month period, prior to obtaining an unrestricted license. The three stages are a six month learner's phase, a 12 month intermediate phase, and an unrestricted license. Recommended components within each stage are:

Stage 1: Learner's Permit

- Minimum age recommended by state.
- Pass vision and knowledge test.
- Licensed adult (at least age 21) required in vehicle at all times.
- All vehicle occupants must wear safety belts.
- All drivers under age 21 subject to lower blood alcohol concentration (i.e. zero tolerance < 0.02 BAC).
- Visually distinct license.
- Must remain crash-and conviction-free for six consecutive months to move to the next stage.

Stage 2: Intermediate License

- Successfully complete stage 1.
- Minimum age recommended by state.
- Pass second level knowledge test, including safe driving practices and an on-road driving test.
- Restricted hours of driving unless supervised by a parent/guardian or licensed adult at least 21 years of age.
- All occupants must wear safety belts.
- All drivers under age 21 subject to lower blood alcohol concentration (i.e. zero tolerance < 0.02 BAC).
- Youth-oriented and more rapid driver improvement actions are taken in the event of violations or at-fault crashes.

	License Stages			Components						
	Learner's Permit Required	Intermediate License	Night Restriction	Parent Participation	Driver Education	Crash/Conviction Free Period	Youth Driver Improvement Action	Visually Distinct License	Lower BAC	Mandatory Safety Belt
California	X	X		X	X			X	X	X
Colorado	X	X			X			X		X
Idaho *			X		X			X	X	X
Illinois *	X		X		X			X	X	X
Louisiana *			X		X		X	X	X	X
Maryland	X	X	X		X	X		X	X	X
Massachusetts	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X
New Jersey	X		X		X		X		X	X
New York	X	X	X		X		X	X		X
Oregon		X					X	X	X	X
Pennsylvania	X	X	X		X	X		X		X
South Carolina *	X		X		X			X		X
South Dakota *			X					X		X
Vermont		X			X		X	X	X	X
West Virginia	X	X			X		X	X	X	X
Wisconsin	X	X			X		X	X	X	X

* Restrictions are attached to full license (no intermediate license issued).

FIGURE 1 Graduated driver licensing system components (states with licensing stages and/or nighttime restriction).

- Intermediate license is visually distinct from learner's permit and regular license.
- Must remain crash-and conviction-free for 12 consecutive months to move to the next stage.
- Parent participation in driving process — certifying that the novice driver had a minimum number of supervised hours of driving.

Stage 3: Full License

- Successfully complete the intermediate license stage.

GRADUATED LICENSING IN THE STATES

Although licensing practices vary from state to state, several states have components of a graduated licensing system. California, Colorado, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Wisconsin require a three-tiered licensing system for young drivers. Of these states, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York and Pennsylvania have nighttime driving restrictions. California, Maryland, Massachusetts, and West Virginia have zero tolerance laws for under age 21. Wisconsin has zero tolerance for under age 19. In California, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin, the new driver must have completed driver education to be eligible for an intermediate license. California is the only state requiring certification of driving practice by a supervising

adult to be eligible for an intermediate license. In Pennsylvania and Maryland the driver must have one year of conviction-free driving to be eligible for an unrestricted license. All of these states have a visually distinct license.

Other states, such as Illinois, New Jersey, Oregon, and Vermont, require a two-tiered licensing system having several components of graduated licensing. Other states such as Idaho, Louisiana, South Carolina, and South Dakota may not require a permit prior to being licensed but they all have a nighttime driving restriction attached to their full license. The attached chart shows which states have stages of licensing or a minimum of five components of graduated licensing or a nighttime driving restriction.

NHTSA'S INITIATIVES IN GRADUATED LICENSING

To encourage states to adopt graduated licensing, NHTSA has awarded \$1.2 million in grants to five states (Alaska, North Carolina, Florida, Tennessee and Vermont) to implement and evaluate components of a graduated driver licensing system. NHTSA also has convened a graduated driver licensing task force of leaders from eight national organizations to develop a plan of action to encourage states to implement graduated driver licensing systems.

Of the five states awarded grants, Florida, Tennessee and Vermont have just been awarded

funding, therefore initiatives in those states are just beginning. The status of Alaska and North Carolina's actions are as follows:

Alaska — A graduated licensing bill was introduced in the House of Representatives in 1995. The bill is pending before the full House. Included in the bill are a nighttime driving restriction, a parental participation requirement, more rapid driver improvement actions, zero tolerance for all drivers under age 21, and a requirement for violation free driving for one year. The proposed nighttime driving restriction between the hours of 1:00 a.m. and 5:00 a.m. has been controversial.

Alaska passed, effective July 1, 1994, a "use it-lose it" law which provides that youth between the ages of 14 and 21 who use or possess alcohol or illegal drugs will lose their license or privilege to obtain a license for a specified period of time.

North Carolina — A graduated driver licensing bill was passed by the Senate but has not been acted on by the House. The bill is eligible for action during the 1996 legislative session. If passed, North Carolina drivers under the age of 18 will be required to obtain a learner's permit for six months, and to complete six months without a moving violation before being allowed to drive unsupervised. All occupants of a vehicle driven by a person under the age of 18 must wear safety belts. The bill also tightens up a loophole in the existing driver education requirement, mandating the six hour 'on-the-road' component to involve six hours of actual driving experience, not merely riding in the vehicle for that period of time. In separate legislation, a zero tolerance (0.02 BAC) provision was enacted for drivers under the age of 21.

NHTSA recently convened a graduated driver licensing task force made up of leaders from eight national organizations to establish common goals, to combine resources, and to establish a plan of action for encouraging states to implement graduated licensing. The task force includes leaders from the American Automobile Association (AAA) and the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (AHAS), the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), the National Association for Independent Insurers (NAII), the National Association of Governor's Highway Safety Representatives

(NAGHSR), and the National Committee on Uniform Traffic Laws and Ordinances (NCUTLO). The task force agreed to a common definition and critical components of a graduated driver licensing system. Several states have already requested assistance and organizations have made their resources available to support efforts to encourage implementation of graduated licensing in these states.

NHTSA encourages all states to consider a three staged graduated driver licensing system for novice drivers under the age of 18. NHTSA will continue to support task force efforts, provide resources to states, provide guidance and consultation on the implementation of graduated licensing components, and provide testimony before state legislatures.

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