

Traffic Safety of Drivers Eligible for Hardship Permits

Oregon drivers whose driving privileges have been suspended are eligible to apply for a hardship permit, *unless* they were suspended for:

- failure to pay child support;
- court denial of juvenile driving privileges;
- a controlled substance conviction;
- failure to appear for or pass required (physical or mental) tests;
- failure to obtain a required medical clearance;
- a mental or physical condition;
- habitual incompetence, recklessness, criminal negligence, or committing a serious violation of the motor vehicle laws;
- notification by the superintendent of a hospital;
- violation of an existing hardship or probationary permit;
- a 'guilty except for insanity' finding for a traffic offense; or
- failure to install and/or use an Ignition Interlock Device when required.

Hardship permits allow a specific list of driving reasons and destinations. These typically include driving to and from work, on the job, to get medical treatment, to seek employment, or to take part in an alcohol or drug rehabilitation program.

Oregon drivers whose driving privileges have been revoked for being a habitual offender may apply for a probationary permit that allows driving with restrictions similar to those for a hardship permit.

A non-refundable fee of \$50 must accompany application for a hardship or probationary permit. Approximately 5,400 hardship permits and 150 probationary permits are issued each year, although nearly 50,000 drivers are eligible.

Driving by Suspended Drivers

It is well documented in a number of studies that many suspended drivers do continue to drive. The frequency with which suspended drivers continue to operate motor vehicles is very difficult to estimate.

We do know that some driving does take place by suspended/revoked drivers because many citations are given to drivers who are caught driving without a valid license. However, the only drivers caught are those who are involved in a crash or who are stopped for a traffic offense. Researchers estimate that 40% to nearly 80% of suspended drivers drive in violation of their suspension, but the impact on total miles driven and the caution exercised while driving unlawfully is not known.

Previous Study

A 1991 study by the Oregon DMV found the crash rates of drivers operating with a hardship permit to be only slightly higher than drivers who were eligible for a hardship permit but had neither applied for or received one.

The overall safety risk of the population of drivers eligible for special driving permits was not addressed in the previous study. The ODOT Policy Section, with sponsorship from the Federal Highway Administration, recently examined that risk.

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Demographics of Suspended drivers

Drivers suspended and eligible for a hardship permit in calendar year 2000 was younger and more predominately male than the population of drivers who did not receive a suspension within the same period.

Demographic Comparison of Study and Control Groups		
	Suspended	Control
Age (years)	34.9	46.7
% Female	28.1%	44.9%

Crashes by Suspended Drivers

After adjusting for the differences in age and gender, the study reveals a persistent reduction in the crash rate of drivers following their suspension.

Prior to their suspension, the drivers in the study group were a greater risk to traffic safety than a control group of drivers who would not be suspended in calendar year 2000. Starting immediately after their suspension and continuing on through the next two calendar years, the crash rate for the suspended drivers drops below that of the control group. The group of suspended drivers becomes, as a whole, less of a threat to traffic safety than the general population.

Average Crashes by Year		
Year	Suspended	Control
2000	0.143	0.035
2001	0.031	0.037
2002	0.025	0.030

The reason or reasons for the improved traffic safety record of this particular group of suspended drivers are unclear. It may be due to reduced driving exposure, more cautious driving, or reasons not related to the suspension itself. The aim of safety-related suspensions and revocations is to improve highway safety by reducing the impact that poor drivers have on the number of crashes. Suspensions for reasons that are eligible for hardship permits are effective at improving traffic safety.