

**SHOULD OREGON DMV REQUIRE A
KNOWLEDGE TEST AT RENEWAL?**

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SHOULD OREGON DMV REQUIRE A KNOWLEDGE TEST AT RENEWAL?

STATE RESEARCH PROJECT 500-020

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16. Abstract Persons renewing their Oregon driver license do not need to take a knowledge test. Oregon DMV requested that ODOT Research Section review the testing practices of other states to determine what alternative approaches are taken to retesting adult drivers for their knowledge of driving practices and laws. A review of state driving laws and policies was completed. No state requires all driver license renewal applicants to take a knowledge test. Fourteen states require a knowledge test or traffic sign recognition test when renewing the driver license if the driver meets certain criteria. States with requirements primarily use criteria that relates to the driving record and license status. Typically it is suspended and/or revoked drivers that must take the knowledge test. In some cases the age of the driver is a consideration. It was also found that few states provide information on new traffic laws and safe driving tips that will be clearly visible to the driver accessing information on the website about driver license renewal.			
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Currently Oregon Driver and Motor Vehicle Services (DMV) requires a knowledge test and road test for drivers applying for their first Oregon drivers license. Drivers under the age of 18 have additional requirements. Persons renewing their Oregon license do not need to take a knowledge test. Drivers over 50 must take a vision test. Drivers licensed in other states who have an unexpired license must take the knowledge test and a vision test, but do not have to take a road test. Persons with a license that is expired longer than a year have to meet the requirements for an initial driver license.

Driver license applicants take their knowledge test at a computer. Other options are available for persons with special needs. The knowledge test consists of 35 questions which are randomly selected from a large pool of questions. To pass, a person must get a minimum of 28 questions (80%) correct. If taking the computerized test, the person gets immediate feedback on whether their answer is correct or incorrect and what the correct answer is. Persons failing the test may retake the test the following day.

Oregon DMV requested that ODOT Research Section review the testing practices of other states to determine what alternative approaches are taken to retesting adult drivers for their knowledge of driving practices and laws. DMV is also interested in evaluations that may have been completed to determine to what extent the outcome of knowledge tests is an indication of safe driving.

This report is organized as follows: Section 2.0 summarizes the results of a literature review on the outcome of knowledge tests and other practices designed to remind and update current drivers on traffic laws, signs, and safe driving practices. Section 3.0 summarizes information on other state's testing practices. Section 4.0 provides conclusions and recommendations.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review was conducted to serve several purposes. The first was to identify any research that had been completed to assess whether or not knowledge test results were a good predictor of future driving competence. The second was to identify practices used in other states to provide continuing education to licensed drivers regarding traffic laws, traffic signs, and safe driving practices. The intent was to identify states that required drivers renewing their driver license to take the knowledge test and also to discover what efforts states were making to keep currently licensed drivers informed about traffic laws and safe driving tips.

2.1 GUIDELINES FOR KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

The American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA) provides guidance for states developing and administering both knowledge and skills tests. The *AAMVA Guidelines for Knowledge and Skill Development* were initially developed in 1997 and updated in 2006 to support the development of the Noncommercial Model Driver Testing System. The guidelines primarily address testing first time drivers and provide guidance on subjects to be included, test design, grade level standards, and scoring standards. The premise upon which the guidelines are based is that driver license tests measure knowledge and skills and serve as incentive of driver license applicants to acquire knowledge needed to pass the tests and that passing the tests will contribute to safe driving.

The Guidelines state “Research has shown that a license testing program directed at critical knowledge requirements is capable of reducing the likelihood that drivers would be involved in accidents for which they are responsible.” No references are given for this assertion. The Guidelines acknowledge, but do not provide specifics on, research that has attempted to correlate test scores with future driving behavior. The Guidelines assert that while the knowledge test can be expected to improve driving behavior since the test is designed to assess a person’s understanding of the driving laws, signs, and practices included in the driver manual, the test is not designed to predict driving behavior. Specific reasons cited are:

- Factors, other than the knowledge test, have a far greater impact on whether someone drives safely than the score received on the knowledge test. These include miles driven, age, gender, education, driving environment, and driver attitude. It would be difficult to allow for these differences when conducting an evaluation.
- Since all drivers must pass the knowledge test to receive a driver license and drive the variance in scores is limited.
- The purpose of the test is not to predict future driving but to improve it. The tests are designed to require knowledge of information in the driver manual and, in doing so, improve driving.

2.2 OTHER RESEARCH

California has completed a significant amount of research to evaluate knowledge tests, primarily to compare the pass rate on different test versions and to compare pass rates on Spanish language tests to those in English (*Masten 1998; Masten 1999; Chapman and Masten 2002; Reiner and Hagge 2006; Brar 2008*). The results of the research were used to identify modifications to be made to the tests. A future research project is planned that will be designed to evaluate the impact of knowledge tests for renewal applicants. Not all persons are required to take the knowledge test at renewal. To perform the research would require waiving the requirement for testing for a sample of drivers that would normally be required to take the test at renewal, i.e., persons with any type of driving probation or suspension or who are 70 or older. Those not taking the test would be considered a control group whose driving records could be compared to the driver record of those who took the test. (*Hagge 2011*).

Robert Hagge, Research Manager of the Driver Competency and Safety Section, Research and Development Branch of the State of California Department of Motor Vehicles, provided some additional information about the results of research on knowledge testing. He said that studies have looked at the relationship between test scores and crash and violation rates, but findings from those studies (some showing weak relationships, both positive and negative) don't indicate what the effect of doing away with the test requirement would be.

In addition, Hagge said "Based on the available literature on driver knowledge testing and our experience over the years, we have concluded (though have not proven) that testing does have safety value. Any such effects likely accrue primarily as a result of knowledge testing serving (a) at least minimally as a screening device (b) as an educational and/or supervisory device for negligent operators, thereby reducing their crash risk and violation propensity, and (c) as an effective diagnostic device for functionally limited drivers in combination with a battery of other assessment and educational tools used during the in-office renewal process." (*Hagge 2011*)

2.3 REVIEW OF STATE KNOWLEDGE TESTING PRACTICES

Several sources were consulted to identify states that required some drivers to take a knowledge test at renewal. The sources included the AAMVA website, the American Automobile Association (AAA) website, and the websites of individual states. It was found that fourteen states require drivers meeting certain criteria to take a knowledge test at renewal and at least two states require a road sign test for all renewal applicants. The details are given in the next section.

2.4 ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

Many if not all states have various public education efforts in place to communicate with currently licensed drivers about new laws and safe driving practices.

ODOT's Transportation Safety Division has conducted a comprehensive public information program that focuses on new laws and safe driving. The program, in its current form, was initiated in the early 1980's when there were numerous changes to the drinking driver laws and safety belt/child safety seat requirements. The program, which is funded in part by the National

Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), has used television and radio public service announcement, print ads, billboards, and transit ads, continues to provide information on new laws as well as safe driving tips. Periodic surveys are conducted to measure effectiveness.

A review of all state websites was completed to identify states that provided information on new traffic laws and safe driving guidance on their website. The approach was to locate the website of the motor vehicle department for each state or the state department of which driver licensing was a division or section and to assess whether a currently licensed driver accessing the website to get driver license renewal information would be provided information about new traffic laws or safe driving tips. For the most part, the answer was “no”. The few states that were an exception were Kentucky, Nebraska, Wyoming and Oregon. A person seeking information on traffic laws and safe driving could generally find information on these topics on all websites by searching the website. It is not likely that many drivers will take the initiative to do this.

In the case of Oregon, information on new traffic laws including changes relating to the use of cell phones while driving that will take effect on January 1, 2012 are included on the Department of Transportation home page. There is also safe winter driving tips and requirements for traction tires and devices. When accessing the DMV website no information on new laws or safe driving tips is readily apparent. When key words including “safe driving”, “new traffic laws”, “cell phone use” were searched, no meaningful results were obtained.

Information provided on websites tends to change frequently. It may be that were this review repeated at another time of year, perhaps soon after the state legislature convened, the results would be different.

3.0 STATES WITH KNOWLEDGE TEST REQUIREMENTS FOR SOME RENEWALS

States have very different practices regarding types of testing required for both new drivers and drivers seeking to renew their driver license. Requirements vary due to the driving record, age, whether the person has an expired license, and whether the person is moving into the state from another state.

Summary information available on the AAA and AAMVA websites was supplemented with information from a report done by Oregon DMV staff on driver licensing testing requirements (*Oregon DMV 2011*) and a survey conducted on the AAMVA website by ODOT Research on Knowledge Test at Renewal. Information from these sources was confirmed by consulting each state's website. No state requires all drivers to take a knowledge test at renewal though at least two states (North Carolina and Missouri) require drivers to take a road sign recognition test as part of the renewal process. Many states require applicants with an expired license to take a knowledge test when applying for a new license. Fourteen states require applicants meeting certain criteria to take a knowledge or traffic sign recognition test at the time of renewal. These criteria include driver license record and age. The review did not consider practices that might be in effect regarding testing of drivers referred through the medically at-risk programs that are in place in many states.

3.1 CALIFORNIA

In California, persons can renew their license by mail unless they have already received two five year extensions by mail, will be 70 or more by the time their license expires, or have any type of driving probation or suspension. Persons with any type of driving probation or suspension or who are 70 or older must take a knowledge test during the renewal process. The test form is double sided with 18 questions on each side. An applicant taking a test for driver license renewal answers the 18 questions on the front of the form. Three of these questions are mandatory by law. New questions added due to a law change are normally placed on the first page of the test within the first 18 questions. (*Brenda O'Donnell 2012*)

3.2 COLORADO

In Colorado, drivers whose license has been suspended, revoked, cancelled or denied must go through a process of reinstatement. If the license was revoked, cancelled or denied, the reinstatement process requires passing a knowledge test and road test. The reinstatement process for a point suspension requires passing a written test at renewal.

3.3 FLORIDA

In Florida, which issues licenses for eight years in most cases, drivers with a moving violation in the last three years or a license suspension in the last seven years must take a road sign recognition test.

3.4 GEORGIA

In Georgia, drivers whose license has been revoked must take the knowledge test.

3.5 ILLINOIS

In Illinois, drivers must take a knowledge test every eight years unless their driver record is clear of any infractions.

3.6 INDIANA

In Indiana, drivers who have six or more points on their driving record must take the knowledge test when renewing their driver license. Drivers under 21 who have any points must take the knowledge test.

3.7 KANSAS

In Kansas, persons whose license has been suspended or revoked are required to apply for a new license when they are eligible to have their license reinstated. They must pass all the tests required for a first-time driver.

3.8 NEVADA

In Nevada, drivers who have more than two moving violation or any license suspension, revocation, cancellation or denial within the last four years must renew in person and may be required to take a knowledge test.

3.9 OKLAHOMA

In Oklahoma, persons whose license has been revoked may be required to take the knowledge and skills tests.

3.10 SOUTH CAROLINA

Drivers must pass the knowledge test if they have accumulated five or more points on their driving record in the last two years. If the driver license is suspended under the point system for DUI or for two charges of reckless driving the driver must take both the knowledge and road test.

3.11 SOUTH DAKOTA

In South Dakota, a person whose license has been revoked must pass the knowledge test, and possibly the driving test, in order to get his license back. A person whose license has been suspended will need to take the knowledge test to get his license back if his license has expired.

3.12 UTAH

In Utah, a driver applying to renew his driver license who has had more than four moving violations, a conviction for reckless driving, or any suspension or revocation during the previous five years, must take the knowledge test.

3.13 VERMONT

In Vermont, a person whose license has been revoked, who is eligible to get their license back, must apply for a new driver license. This includes taking a knowledge test.

3.14 VIRGINIA

In Virginia, a knowledge test is administered at renewal when the driver is revoked or when the driver is under review for cognitive issues. A driver age 20 renewing a license that has received at least one conviction of a demerit point violation must take the knowledge test.

No research was identified that supports the effectiveness of the knowledge test requirement for drivers renewing their driver license. The fact that there are numerous states that include the knowledge test as a licensing requirement for some drivers with a history of driving problems provides support that this option may have merit.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

AAMVA Guidelines for Knowledge and Skill Test Development (2007) focuses on providing guidance for the development and scoring of knowledge tests for first time drivers. The premise upon which the guidelines are based is that driver license tests measure knowledge and skills and serve as an incentive for driver license applicants to acquire knowledge needed to pass the tests. In turn, passing the tests will contribute to safe driving.

No research regarding the relationship between scores received on knowledge tests and future driving performance was identified. Nor was research on the value of requiring a knowledge test at renewal for all drivers or drivers meeting certain criteria identified. However, the state of California is contemplating conducting such a study.

A review of state driving laws and policies was completed. Programs relating to medically at-risk drivers were not included in the review. No state requires all driver license renewal applicants to take a knowledge test. Fourteen states require a knowledge test or traffic sign recognition test when renewing the driver license if the driver meets certain criteria. This information was confirmed by reviewing information on each of these states' websites. States with requirements primarily use criteria that relates to the driving record and license status. Typically it is suspended and/or revoked drivers that must take the knowledge test. In some cases the age of the driver is a consideration. The fact that there are numerous states that include the knowledge test as a licensing requirement for some drivers with a history of driving problems provides support that this option may have merit.

Few states provide information on new traffic laws and safe driving tips that will be clearly visible to the driver accessing information on the website about driver license renewal. Many states probably provide information on new laws and safe driving through other channels. The National Highway Safety Administration (NHTSA) considers these programs a priority and provides funds to states that can be used for this purpose as well as other highway safety efforts.

Oregon has for many years had a public education program using a variety of media to share information on new traffic laws and safety driving practices with currently licensed drivers. The ODOT website provides information on laws in such a way that anyone using the website will see the information and can easily access more detailed information. As is the case in most states, the Oregon DMV website does not provide information on traffic laws affecting driver performance but focuses on such things as hours of operation, on line services, commercial motor vehicle requirements, and new driver license identification requirements.

These conclusions support three recommendations:

- There is no evidence that indicates that Oregon DMV should consider requiring all drivers renewing their driver license to pass a knowledge test.
- While there is no clear evidence that there are safety benefits resulting from requiring revoked or suspended drivers to pass a knowledge test at renewal, a requirement for knowledge testing that targeted this group of drivers may have merit. Prior to pursuing this option a more complete review of programs in place in other states should be completed, costs should be fully evaluated, and an evaluation plan should be put in place.
- The alternative of enhancing information on traffic laws and safe driving that is provided on the ODOT and DMV websites should be pursued. This approach would be relatively low cost and would reach a broad spectrum of drivers. ODOT should continue to provide similar information through other media including TV and radio PSAs and billboards.

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