

Uniform Guidelines *for* State Highway Safety Programs



March 2009

Highway Safety Program Guideline No. 5

Non-Commercial Driver Licensing

Each State, in cooperation with its political subdivisions and tribal governments, should develop and implement a comprehensive, culturally competent highway safety program, reflective of State demographics, to achieve a significant reduction in traffic crashes, fatalities, and injuries on public roads. Each State should have a driver licensing program ensuring that every driver is adequately trained and tested, evaluated for physical and mental fitness, when appropriate, and possesses only one driver license and driver record.

I. PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

Each State should have a licensing agency that ensures only those qualified to operate motor vehicles obtain a valid State driver license applicable to vehicles they are authorized to operate. This agency should:

- Ensure that drivers are appropriately licensed for the vehicles they operate;
- Ensure that driver license applicants are appropriately screened for correct identity;
- Ensure that documents used to establish identity are appropriately analyzed;
- Take appropriate measures to ensure that applicants are not licensed in other States;
- Provide driver licenses that are tamper resistant to prevent fraudulent use of the document;
- Provide driver licenses that clearly indicate if the driver is under 21 years of age; and
- Ensure that license issuing offices maintain industry standards for security to prevent license issuance to ineligible applicants.

II. LEGISLATION, REGULATION, AND POLICY

A model driver licensing program should provide, at a minimum, that each driver:

- Hold only one license, which identifies the type(s) of vehicle(s) he or she is authorized to operate;
- Submits acceptable proof of identity in applying for an original, renewal, or re-application of a driver's license;
- Passes an examination demonstrating:
 - Ability to operate the class(es) of vehicles(s) for which he or she is licensed;
 - Ability to read and comprehend traffic signs and symbols;

- Knowledge of laws relating to traffic (rules of the road) safe driving procedures, vehicle and highway safety features, emergency situations that arise in the operation of a vehicle, and other driver responsibilities; and
- Visual acuity, which must meet or exceed State guidelines; and
- Renews the license, in-person, periodically with skill testing and medical examinations, as appropriate.

A model Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) law should require each driver under age 18 to participate in a GDL System, a three-stage system that incrementally adds privileges for novice drivers as they gain experience driving. The three-stage process should include the following progressive steps:

- First, the young, novice driver receives a learner's permit that:
 - Starts no younger than 16 years of age;
 - Requires completion of a minimum of 6 months driving without an at-fault crash or traffic violation;
 - Requires supervised driving at all times in which the supervising licensed driver is age 21 or older; and
 - Prohibits the use of portable electronic communication or entertainment devices while driving.
- Next, the young driver receives an intermediate, or provisional, permit that:
 - Requires completion of a minimum of 6 months driving without an at-fault crash or traffic violation;
 - Imposes nighttime driving restrictions;
 - Imposes teenage passenger restrictions;
 - Prohibits the use of portable electronic communication or entertainment devices while driving; and
 - Mandates adherence to State seat belt use requirements.
- The third and final stage is full licensure with:
 - Passenger, nighttime and portable electronic devices restrictions until age 18; and
 - Maximum blood alcohol limits of .02 until age 21.
- The driver should receive driver education that meets standards set by the State that are related to the State driving manual and driving test and, to the greatest degree possible, increases the safety performance of new drivers. (Under no circumstance should driver education reduce the time required to pass through the GDL system.)

III. DRIVER FITNESS

Each State should have:

- A system that provides medical evaluation of people who the driver licensing agency has reason to believe have mental or physical conditions that might impair their driving abilities;
- A procedure that will keep the driver license agency informed of all licensed drivers who are currently applying for or receiving any type of tax, welfare, or other benefits or exemptions for the blind or visually impaired beyond established State vision requirements;
- A medical advisory board or equivalent allied health professional unit composed of qualified personnel to advise the driver license agency on medical criteria, including alcohol use and vision guidelines; and
- Protection from civil liability for individuals who report, in good faith, potentially at-risk drivers to the licensing authority.

IV. MOTORCYCLE OPERATOR LICENSING

States should require every person who operates a motorcycle on public roadways to pass an examination designed especially for motorcycle operation and to hold a license endorsement specifically authorizing motorcycle operation. Each State should have a motorcycle licensing system that requires:

- A motorcycle operator's manual that contains essential information on reducing the risks associated with riding a motorcycle;
- A motorcycle license examination, including knowledge and skill tests, and State licensing medical criteria;
- License examiner training specific to testing of motorcyclists;
- Motorcycle license endorsement;
- Cross referencing of motorcycle registrations with motorcycle licenses to identify motorcycle owners who do not have the proper endorsement;
- Motorcycle license renewal requirements;
- Learner's permits issued for a period of at least 90 days and the establishment of limits on the number and frequency of learner's permits issued per applicant to encourage each motorcyclist to get full endorsement; and
- Penalties for violation of motorcycle licensing requirements.

V. DRIVER RECORDS, DATA, AND EVALUATION

Each State should maintain a driver control record on each licensed driver that includes identification information, principle residence, and driver history. (See Highway Safety Program Guideline No. 10 – Traffic Records.) In addition to the historical aspect, the traffic records system should be conducive to:

- Timely, accurate, and complete entry of data into the system;
- Ease of accessibility to the system to give timely, accurate, and complete information on drivers for users of the system. Functional users may include courts, administrative/legal personnel, motor vehicle administration, law enforcement, research and development, and private citizens;
- Real-time availability of data to provide DMV personnel and other system users with a rapid-response system for the information requested on standard and priority requests for eligibility of an applicant for issuance of a driver license;
- Ad-hoc reporting for statistical and other research purposes;
- Real-time identification of problem drivers for enforcement or other operational countermeasures; and
- Medical restriction or suspension/revocation information.

Each license should be issued for a specific term, and should be renewed to remain valid. At time of issuance or renewal each driver's record should be checked.

Motorcycle registration and licensing records should be linked to ensure that riders are properly licensed and trained.

There should be a driver improvement program to identify problem drivers for record review and other appropriate actions designed to reduce the frequency of their involvement in traffic crashes or violations.

The non-commercial driver licensing program should be periodically evaluated by the State. The evaluation should, among other issues, attempt to ascertain the extent to which driving without a license occurs.

VI. COMMUNICATION PROGRAM

States should develop and implement communication strategies directed at supporting policy and program elements. In collaboration with motor vehicle and other State agencies, the SHSO should consider a statewide communications plan and campaign that:

- Informs the public about State licensing requirements;
- Identifies audiences at particular risk and develops appropriate messages;
- Provides information about driver fitness requirements and mental or physical conditions that might impair driving abilities;
- Informs motorcycle registrants of the need to obtain an appropriate motorcycle endorsement or license;
- Provides culturally competent materials;
- Informs parents/guardians about the role of supervised driving and the State's GDL law; and
- Informs novice drivers about underage drinking and zero tolerance laws (in effect in all 50 States and the District of Columbia), such as including information in manuals for new drivers and including a question about the topic on the written test for a learner's permit.