

# Traffic Safety Facts

## Traffic Tech – Technology Transfer Series



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## Evaluation of Oregon's Graduated Driver Licensing Program

The State of Oregon enacted its Graduated Driver's License (GDL) program in March 2000. Oregon's GDL program includes both a nighttime driving restriction (midnight-5 a.m.) for the first year, and a passenger restriction (no passengers younger than age 20 in the first 6 months; no more than three passengers younger than age 20 in the second 6 months). The GDL law also mandates either 50 hours of supervised driving and the completion of an Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) approved driver education course, or 100 hours of supervised driving (without completion of the driver education course).

NHTSA contracted with the Center for Applied Research (CAR) to conduct an evaluation of Oregon's GDL program. CAR obtained evaluation data through two methods: 1) focus groups and 2) driver performance (i.e., crashes, convictions, and suspensions).

### Focus Groups

CAR conducted 14 focus groups in Oregon: 5 groups were composed of parents of teenage drivers; 1 group of DMV road test administrators, 1 group of driving instructors, 1 group of law enforcement officers, and 1 group of high school administrators. Additionally, CAR interviewed two Oregon judges who presided over traffic adjudications involving teenagers.

All of the participating groups showed strong support for GDL requirements and restrictions. Although many of the teenagers disliked the restrictions, even they felt the GDL program enhanced their safety.

The participants understood the requirements for driver education and/or supervised practice before licensure, as well as the restrictions placed on the first 6 months of licensure; they did not understand the restrictions placed on the second 6 months of licensure. The parents, teens, law enforcement officers, and driving instructors believed that teens became overconfident after approximately 6 months of licensure, and were therefore prone to making mistakes after the first 6 months.

All groups considered parents to be the front line for both implementation and enforcement of the GDL program.

Educating the public on the importance of parental monitoring and enforcing their teens' progress through the GDL program would highlight this crucial component. Providing parents with guidelines and direction for this monitoring may be beneficial.

All groups cited peer pressure as a factor for noncompliance. Participants believed that strong enforcement would mitigate the influence of peers.

Participants perceived the DMV as weak when enforcing the practice requirements for the GDL program. Most respondents wanted the DMV to require use of the practice log and wanted the DMV to collect it. Additionally, participants believed that law enforcement enforced the restrictions unevenly. Most parents and teens were unaware that law enforcement officers could not make traffic stops solely for GDL violations. There was strong support for GDL to become subject to primary enforcement. Many law enforcement officers were supportive of teen drivers using special stickers indicating that they were not driving on a full license.

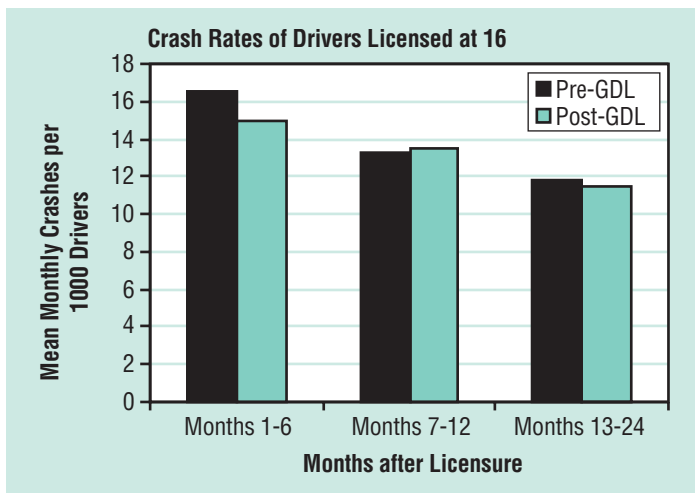
Parents felt empowered by the GDL program. Many of the adult participants saw the GDL program serving a wider purpose of gradually ushering a teen into adult responsibilities. They expected the GDL program's implementation and enforcement to have long-lasting effect on individuals' broader attitudes toward the law.

### Driver Performance

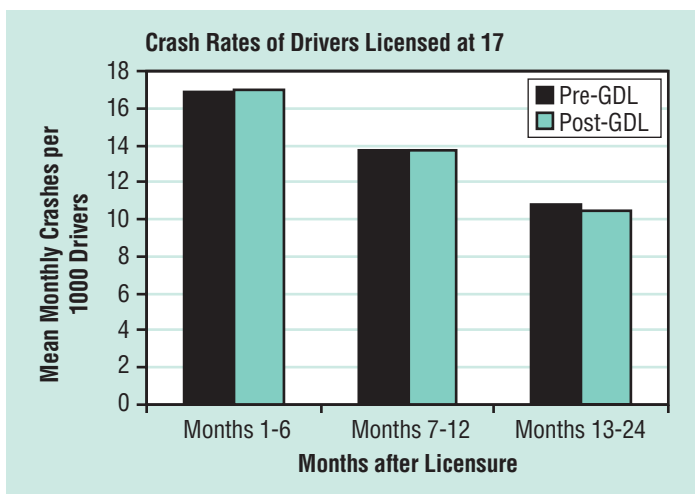
CAR evaluated Oregon's GDL program comparing teen drivers before and after implementation of the GDL program, and to an adult comparison group (ages 25-65).

Crash rates for 16-year-old drivers were significantly lower after implementation of the GDL program, particularly in the first 6 months of licensure.

The 17-year-olds also demonstrated lower post-GDL crash rates; though significant differences did not surface until the second year after the GDL program took effect and all 17-year-olds had been licensed under the GDL program.



After GDL implementation, traffic conviction (a judgment of guilt against a traffic offender) and license suspension (when the State takes an offender’s license for a predetermined amount of time) rates were lower for all age groups, even among the unrestricted 18- and 19-year-old novice drivers. Older novice teens exhibited higher conviction and suspension rates than younger teens, perhaps due to greater exposure.



In every age group, in every time period, for either GDL status, males had significantly higher conviction and suspension rates than females. After GDL implementation, however, male crash rates generally dropped closer to the female crash rates.

In Oregon, teens can take an approved ODOT driver education course plus 50 hours of supervised driving, or they could waive the course in lieu of 100 hours of supervised driving. Teen drivers who opted to take an approved ODOT driver education course had fewer crashes, traffic convictions, and suspensions than those who chose the 100 supervised driving hours option. It is important to determine whether better outcomes are associated directly with the ODOT-approved training courses, or if they are an artifact of another variable such as selection bias. It is important to note that there was no way to verify that the teen drivers who opted for 100 hours of supervised practice actually completed 100 hours of practice. Focus group participants reported that many parents might have simply signed the ODOT form verifying the 100 hours of practice regardless of how many, or how few, hours their teen driver actually completed.

The analysis of convictions, suspensions, and crashes offers strong support for GDL programs. It seems clear that Oregon’s GDL program is associated with improved safety. Particularly for 16-year-old drivers, suspensions and crashes dropped by the second year of GDL implementation, even when controlled for adult suspension and crash rates. In combination with the support shown by all participants in the focus groups, it appears that GDL is a strong and feasible legislative countermeasure that States can implement to reduce teen novice driver crashes.

### How to Order

To order *Evaluation of Oregon’s Graduated Driver Licensing Program* (66 pages plus appendices), prepared by the Center for Applied Research, write to the Office of Behavioral Safety Research, NHTSA, NTI-130, 1200 New Jersey Avenue SE., Washington, DC 20590, fax 202-366-7096, or download from [www.nhtsa.dot.gov](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov). Patty Ellison-Potter, Ph.D. was the Task Order Manager for this project.