

*State Planning Board  
Study*

A STUDY OF DRIVERS IN MAJOR ACCIDENTS

September, 1935 - April, 1936



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STATE PLANNING BOARD

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URBAN LAND USE AND TRAFFIC STUDIES

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The highway accident situation is becoming recognized as one of the major problems of the day. The great social and economic loss is well known. We have passed the "and Sudden Death" phase of the campaign - everyone has become sufficiently awakened to the dangers of highway travel - future work must be devoted to determining the causes of accidents and devising means of eliminating these causes.

The Iowa State Planning Board is eager to cooperate in any concerted movement dedicated to reducing highway accidents such as the program which the recently organized State Safety Council is sponsoring. An intelligent approach to the solution of the accident problem is through the analysis of adequate accident reports. To that end this preliminary study of the drivers involved in major accidents is presented.

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## A STUDY OF DRIVERS IN MAJOR ACCIDENTS

The human factor in accidents has always been great, and it long has been apparent that much must be done in both education and enforcement before marked improvement may be expected in our accident record. Educational programs have been directed at Iowa motor vehicle drivers for some time, but the enactment of a strict Driver's License Law last year was the first official move to reduce accidents by taking the dangerous driver off the road.

This preliminary study of the drivers involved in major accidents in Iowa and their subsequent examination was undertaken by the State Planning Board at the suggestion of the State Motor Vehicle Department. All personal injury and fatal accidents, and those property damage accidents of such serious nature as to indicate the suspension or revocation of the driver's license, occurring in the State from September, 1935 to April, 1936 are included. The 1,209 accidents studied represent only twenty per cent of the accidents of all types that occurred in Iowa during this time. Only the drivers who were determined by the examiners to be at fault are included in this study.

This study was made to determine the effectiveness of the Motor Vehicle Inspection Department in administering the revised Driver's License Law passed by the Legislature in 1935. The inspectors were organized and trained in the fall of 1935, and were placed in the field that winter. The figures shown in this report are the results of their work since that time. It may appear that the investigation of only 70 per cent of the major accidents in the State is a rather poor record, but we must realize that the work was new, the examiners had to be trained, the public had to become accustomed to the new law, and in many cases local law enforcement officers had been lax in these matters.

The purpose and the time available for this study eliminated the consideration of such pertinent data as the location of the accidents, the condition of the vehicles, the weather condition, and the condition of the road. Attention was centered upon the driver, his treatment at the hands of the inspectors, and his previous accident history. However, the Planning Board does contemplate making a detailed analysis in the near future of the causes and the circumstances surrounding all fatal motor accidents which have occurred in Iowa in the last five years.

All the records of the Motor Vehicle Department were available for this study. The need for more complete reporting of accident data is clearly evident. The data on the previous accident history of these drivers have not been completed, and for that reason they are not included in this preliminary report. Because of the fragmentary records, and because many of the cases included in this study were not closed the figures do not check in every instance. In spite of this the figures are a reliable indication of the trend in motor vehicle law enforcement.

An analysis of the statistics shows: -

That two-thirds of the drivers lived in towns or cities of more than 1,000 population. (The 1930 census figures show that less than one-half of the State's population lives in towns and cities of more than 1,000 population.)

That 12 per cent of the drivers at fault in these major accidents were women. (The report of all accidents for 1935 shows that only 9 per cent of the drivers involved in accidents were women.)

That more than one-half of these drivers were summoned to appear for examination. Of the number summoned more than one-sixth failed to appear. Only five per cent of those taking the examination failed to pass.

More than two-thirds of these accidents were investigated by the state inspectors.

One hundred sixty-six driver's licenses were suspended for a total of  $42\frac{1}{2}$  years; 29 licenses were suspended indefinitely; and 22 driver's licenses were revoked. (This is not the final figure on these cases. Obviously the Motor Vehicle Department very rarely suspends licenses prior to a court action being completed. In instances where cases are pending and continuances have been granted more licenses may be suspended.)

Two hundred sixteen charges were filed against drivers in these accidents.



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AGE OF DRIVER		Total	SUMMONED TO APPEAR FOR EXAMINATION		Total
			(continued)		
Under 20. . . . .		120	Failed to appear. . . . .		120
20-29 . . . . .		314	Vehicles inspected. . . . .		58
30-49 . . . . .		340	Driving tests given . . . . .		93
50-64 . . . . .		110	Vision tests given. . . . .		128
65 and over . . . . .		35	Law tests given . . . . .		118
not stated. . . . .		290			
SEX OF DRIVER			DEFECTS		
Male. . . . .		1067	(Determined by the inspectors in the		
Female. . . . .		142	course of their examination.)		
Number of persons killed . . . . .		236	Mental. . . . .		3
Number of persons injured. . . . .		1375	Epilepsy. . . . .		2
IMPROPER DRIVING			Vision. . . . .		8
Speeding. . . . .		93	Heart trouble . . . . .		2
Reckless driving. . . . .		307	Aged, infirm. . . . .		3
On wrong side of road . . . . .		104	Other . . . . .		11
Violated right-of-way . . . . .		194	ACTION TAKEN AGAINST THESE DRIVERS		
Lost control. . . . .		123	CHARGES FILED		216
Cut in. . . . .		13	Careless and reckless driving . . . . .		139
Passing standing street car . . . . .		2	Operating Vehicle while intoxi-		
Passing on curve or hill. . . . .		13	cated. . . . .		31
Passing on wrong side . . . . .		5	Failure to stop at stop sign. . . . .		12
Failed to signal. . . . .		42	Speeding. . . . .		15
Disregarded stop sign . . . . .		48	Overloading . . . . .		2
Hit and run . . . . .		13	Other . . . . .		17
Following too closely . . . . .		33	OPERATOR'S PERMIT SUSPENDED		195
Disregarded signal . . . . .		15	Indefinite. . . . .		29
Improper parking. . . . .		28	10 days . . . . .		12
No improper driving . . . . .		203	15 days . . . . .		26
Not stated. . . . .		157	30 days . . . . .		45
DRIVER'S CONDITION			60 days . . . . .		21
(At time of accident)			90 days . . . . .		20
Asleep. . . . .		13	6 months. . . . .		26
Had been drinking . . . . .		118	1 year. . . . .		16
Physical defects. . . . .		21	PERMIT REVOKED . . . . .		22
View obstructed . . . . .		68	PEDESTRIANS		
Blinded by headlights . . . . .		41	What pedestrians were doing:		
Not stated. . . . .		879	Crossing at intersection . . . . .		59
SUMMONED TO APPEAR FOR EXAMINATION		696	Jay walking. . . . .		168
Passed exam . . . . .		546	Alighting from cars. . . . .		12
Failed exam . . . . .		30	Condition of pedestrians:		
			Intoxicated. . . . .		20

Sixty-seven per cent of the drivers lived in towns or cities of more than one thousand population.

Eight hundred seventy-nine of these accidents were investigated by the State Motor Vehicle Inspectors.