

IIHS urges NHTSA to look beyond education to address speed problems

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The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) should direct resources to more promising speed management measures, rather than courses intended to educate drivers about the dangers of speeding, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety said in a recent regulatory comment.

NHTSA requested comments on a proposed study of the effects of a driver education course covering vehicle speeds, laws, and the risks of speeding. The course would be offered to licensed drivers with at least one speeding citation or conviction over the previous three years.

A large body of evidence shows that education has not been effective in addressing traffic safety issues such as alcohol impaired driving or seat belt use, Jessica Cicchino, IIHS vice president for research, wrote in the comment.

Moreover, drivers already know the risks of speeding, and that knowledge has not influenced their behavior.

According to the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety's 2018 Traffic Safety Culture Index for instance, the majority of U.S. drivers believe that driving 15 mph over the speed limit on freeways and 10 mph over the speed limit on residential streets is very or extremely dangerous. Yet nearly as many drivers admit to having driven that fast over the past month.

Measures such as:

- encouraging the use of automated enforcement and incentivizing automakers to install intelligent speed adaptation
- technology that alerts speeding drivers or automatically slows the vehicle to ensure compliance with speed limits offer greater potential benefits than education. Promoting effective law enforcement strategies, safe speed limits and traffic calming techniques would also be beneficial.

Speeding has been a major factor in more than a quarter of traffic fatalities for over 30 years, so it is important that NHTSA focus on countermeasures that are likely to succeed, rather than further investigating ones that have already proved ineffective, Cicchino added.