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Study: Keeping unlicensed drivers off road nearly impossible

More than 33,000 drivers were cited in Massachusetts in 2011 for driving with a license that had been suspended or revoked for a range of reasons, from failing to pay a fine to driving drunk. Studies have shown that drivers like them – who choose to drive with an invalid license or no license at all – are more likely to be involved in fatal accidents.



By Justin Graeber

Posted Jan. 7, 2013 at 12:01 AM
Updated Jan 7, 2013 at 7:11 AM

BROCKTON

Jose Tacure of Brockton was among the thousands of people caught in Massachusetts this year driving without a license.

He was behind the wheel of a van that struck and nearly killed 16-year-old Redondo Constant in front of Brockton High last March.

Auricelli Braga, 32, of Stoughton, didn't have a driver's license either. But that didn't stop her from driving, as police found out after a fatal accident in Canton last June.

Sara Escudero, 64, a married mother of four and grandmother of two, was on her way to work at a rehabilitation hospital when Braga's vehicle collided with hers. Escudero was killed. Braga was charged with motor vehicle homicide and driving without a license.

Traffic safety experts have long known that drivers who ignore license suspensions or who have never had a valid license pose a particular risk to others on the road. The AAA Foundation, which has published a series of reports titled "[Unlicensed to Kill](#)," found that nearly one in five fatal crashes from 2007 through 2009 involved a driver without a valid license, resulting in the deaths of 21,049 people.

But safe-driving advocates and police alike also know that it's nearly impossible to keep these people from getting behind the wheel.

Massachusetts roads are home to thousands of people who aren't properly licensed to drive but do anyway. In 2011 alone, police officers here issued 33,353 citations for driving with a revoked or suspended license, plus more than 24,678 citations for driving with no license at all, according to the Registry of Motor Vehicles.

Local police say that unlicensed drivers are also far more likely to flee an accident or traffic stop.

"There's no doubt about that," Brockton police Lt. Paul Bonanca said.

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Easton Police Chief Allen Krajcik said people who've had a driver's license that has been suspended or revoked, rather than those who've never had a valid license, are more likely to take off.

"They are the ones who more likely would see jail time," he said. For example, the mandatory penalty for driving with a license suspended for drunken driving is 60 days in jail.

From July 1, 2010 to June 30, 2011, 12 percent of those convicted of driving with a suspended or revoked license in Massachusetts spent time – an average of 10 days – behind bars, not including those also convicted of more serious offenses, according to a state survey of sentencing. For those charged with a second offense, the incarceration rate rose to 57 percent and the average length of stay was two months and three weeks.

East Bridgewater Police Chief John Cowan pointed out that "unlicensed" can mean many things, from someone driving with a license suspended for drunk driving to a 16-year-old with a learner's permit driving without an adult in the car.

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