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Motorists' knowledge of the 'No Smoking' ordinance in southern California

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ABSTRACT: Twenty-nine percent of motorists interviewed in an area where smoking was restricted were misinformed about, or didn't know of, the regulation prohibiting smoking while traveling. Familiarity with the regulation was related to whether the motorist smoked, frequency of use of the area, and place of residence. It was not related to the age and sex of the respondents.

Because of the severe danger of fire, smoking while traveling is prohibited in many wildland areas in southern California. A test of signs designed to mark such restricted areas[1] made it possible to gather information on motorists' familiarity with the prohibition. Those charged with the enforcement of the regulation may find this information helpful in evaluating the effectiveness of their educational efforts.

As part of the interview for the signing study (which was done during July and August 1964), drivers in an area in which the restriction was in force were asked: "Can you tell me what the regulation is regarding smoking while traveling in this National Forest?" For our purposes here, the question is somewhat defective; it informs the motorist that such a regulation exists. This tip undoubtedly affected the responses to some extent. Had the interview situation permitted, the question would have been broached in a more indirect manner. Nevertheless, 29 percent of the motorists gave incorrect answers to the question, or said they did not know.

As the regulation applied only to smokers (54 percent of the drivers admitted that they smoked), one might expect that nonsmokers would be less aware of the regulation than would smokers. This proved to be true, although the difference was not great. One-fourth of the smokers, in contrast to one-third of the nonsmokers, did not know the regulation (table 1). A similar relationship was obtained when the question asked whether anyone in the vehicle smoked. Most of those who were misinformed thought it was permissible to smoke while in a moving vehicle so long as burning material was not tossed out of the windows.

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[1] Folkman, William S. Signing for the ''No Smoking'' ordinance in southern California. Berkeley, Calif.: Pacific SW. Forest & Range Expt. Sta. U.S. Forest Serv. Res. Note PSW-71. 8 pp., illus. 1965.

Table 1. *Knowledge of regulation regarding smoking while traveling and characteristics of the respondents, San Bernardino National Forest, July-August, 1964*

Characteristic	Knows regulation	Misinformed or doesn't know of regulation	Total
	Percent		
Respondent smokes[1]			
Yes	75.4	24.6	100.0
No	67.7	33.3	100.0
Member of party smokes[2]			
Yes	75.1	24.9	100.0
No	65.5	34.5	100.0
Number of times driven road[3]			
First time ever	62.9	37.1	100.0
1 to 5 times this year	68.7	31.3	100.0
6 to 9 times this year	79.5	20.5	100.0
10 or more times this year	81.8	18.2	100.0
Number of years driven road[4]			
This is first year	65.7	34.3	100.0
2 to 3 years	71.8	28.2	100.0
4 to 5 years	75.8	24.2	100.0
More than 5 years	76.5	23.5	100.0
Place of residence[5]			
Local	89.3	10.7	100.0
San Bernardino-Riverside	71.1	28.9	100.0
Los Angeles	66.0	34.0	100.0
Other southern California	71.4	28.6	100.0
Elsewhere	55.1	44.9	100.0
Age[6]			
Less than 30	69.9	30.1	100.0
30 to 44	71.5	28.5	100.0
45 to 54	75.4	24.6	100.0
55 to 64	72.3	27.7	100.0
65 or over	65.1	34.9	100.0
Sex[6]			
Male	71.7	28.3	100.0
Female	71.8	28.2	100.0
Basis, number interviewed	1,527	613	2,140

[1]One d.f., p. <0.001, $\chi^2 = 19.9$
[2]One d.f., p. <0.001, $\chi^2 = 22.5$
[3]Three d.f., p. <0.001, $\chi^2 = 59.5$
[4]Three d.f., p. <0.001, $\chi^2 = 25.6$
[5]Four d.f., p. <0.001, $\chi^2 = 35.6$
[6]Differences not statistically significant.

Correct understanding of the regulation was positively related to the frequency with which the respondents had driven this forest road during the year. Only 18 percent of frequent forest visitors (those who had driven the road 10 or more times) gave incorrect responses or didn't know the regulation. Of drivers for whom this was the first time they had ever driven the road, 37 percent gave incorrect answers. A comparison on the basis of the number of years the respondents had been traveling the road showed a similar though somewhat less marked relationship. Twenty-four percent of those who had traveled the road for more than 5 years answered incorrectly, compared to 34 percent of those for whom this was the first year.

Southern Californians, especially those who resided in or near the Forest, were more likely to understand the regulation than were those from other areas. Only 11 percent of those who resided within the study area were misinformed or didn't know the regulation, compared to 29 percent of those from the nearby San Bernardino-Riverside area. Comparable figures for other areas showed: Los Angeles, 34 percent; remainder of southern California, 29 percent; northern California and out of state, 45 percent.

Age and sex of the respondents were not related to familiarity with the regulations.

Administrators may take heart from these indications that their efforts have had an effect upon those traveling in these wildland areas. For perspective, the 71 percent responding correctly to the question regarding the no-smoking ordinance might be compared with the 21 percent giving a positive response to questions concerning the basic law of the land--the Bill of Rights. In a national poll conducted by the National Opinion Research Center, November 1945, the following questions were asked: What do you know about the Bill of Rights? Do you know anything it says?" Results from the two questions combined showed 79 percent giving incorrect or "don't know" answers.

But one in four smokers is still misinformed or unaware of the regulation. There is still work to be done. It may not be an easy task, for educational efforts have failed to reach 24 percent of those who had traveled in this area more than 5 years.

The Author. . .

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