

The Costs of Avoiding Accidents. Selective Compliance and the ‘Peltzman Effect’ in Italy

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the role of enforcement design in promoting offsetting behaviors (‘Peltzman effect’) due to safety device usage. We investigate the joint effect of the introduction of a point – record driving license (PDRL) in Italy, on compliance with traffic laws, such as seat belt use, and on risk taking behind the wheel. We find that the enforcement of the PDRL resulted in a sharp reduction of seat belt offenses, and a noticeable decrease of road accidents. However, the reduction in occupant fatalities and injuries was counteracted by an increase in non-occupant ones, along with the Peltzman's argument. We argue that when the enforcement design mainly encourages selective compliance with the use of safety devices, it may exacerbate offsetting behaviors.

***Keywords:** offsetting behavior, point – record driving license, seat belts, traffic law enforcement, traffic fatalities.*

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