

Scientists study NASCAR safety rules

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U.S. researchers have determined safety regulations enacted by NASCAR over 21 years have resulted in an increase in accidents.

West Virginia University Professor Russell Sobel and former graduate student Todd Nesbit examined 21 years of NASCAR accident reports and the introduction of various safety requirements.

"When safety regulation makes automobiles safer, drivers may drive more recklessly, partially or completely offsetting effects on the overall level of safety," the researchers said.

Sobel had been interested in exploring whether improved safety in automobiles would be offset by safety incentives. But he found gathering data was difficult, especially for the cars driven by most Americans, because of variations in road conditions, laws and weather factors across the nation. However, he said many of those factors are controlled in NASCAR races, making the sport a perfect subject for the study.

"We are essentially able to test how the same drivers, on the same tracks and in the same weather conditions, alter their behavior in response to changes in automobile safety," Sobel said.

The study by Sobel and Nesbit -- now an assistant professor at Penn State's Behrend College -- appears in the summer issue of the *Southern Economic Journal*.

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