



NEWS RELEASE

Demerit point systems save lives: *Results from the EU funded research project BESTPOINT*

6th of September 2012, Brussels – Recommendations on how to get the best out of a Demerit Point System (also commonly called “penalty points”) are presented today at the BESTPOINT conference¹. High levels of police enforcement, combined with regular communication campaigns, are key elements to sustain the deterrent effect of Demerit Point Systems.

Twenty-one out of the 27 EU Member States have Demerit Point Systems (DPS) in force.² Complementary to traditional fines, a DPS assigns a number of points to certain offences; the more serious the offence, the more points. If, within a certain time period, a defined number of points have been collected, the licence is withdrawn. As such, DPSs address recidivism, leading drivers to check their behaviour as they are afraid of losing their licence.

The impact of a DPS on the number of road collisions is recognised to be significant but in some countries might be temporary. The BESTPOINT Handbook presents key recommendations for designing and implementing a DPS with large and sustained safety benefit. A high level of police enforcement is a prerequisite. Regular communication should both explain the system and promote enforcement activities. Offences that are linked to the main risk factors on the roads should be included such as speeding, drink and drug driving, non use of restraint systems, red light running, dangerous driving or the use of mobile phone^{3,4}. *“This was also strongly supported last year by Members of the European Parliament in our Own Initiative Report on Road Safety,”* confirmed MEP Ines Ayala Sender.

“Countries that have implemented a Demerit Point System report large support from the population that considers such a system to be fair. Unlike fines, a point system treats all parts of society, including those with lower incomes, more fairly and punishes recidivist drivers more severely than drivers who occasionally committed an offence,” said Klaus Machata, Austrian Road Safety Board, and co-author of the Handbook.

BESTPOINT also comes forward with steps towards a long term scenario: one single and binding DPS at EU level. As a precursor for this to work, convergence on the main road safety offences is needed, in particular on speed and alcohol.⁵ Ministers representing the EU 27 Member States had already called for this in December 2010, inviting “the Commission to examine possibilities to harmonise traffic rules at EU level”⁶.

“With the entry into force of the Directive on Cross Border Exchange of Information on road safety related traffic offences, drivers will no longer feel above the law when travelling abroad. Unfortunately, points will not apply to them”, regretted MEP Ines Ayala Sender and MEP George Bach. *“Luxembourg being a transit country, we had to find a way around this. Non-resident drivers committing offences get points on a ‘virtual’ Luxembourgish driving licence. If they lose all their points, their driving licence will be suspended in Luxembourg. This practice could be an inspiration to other Member States,”* said MEP George Bach.

“The Cross Border Directive will set up a system for the cross border follow up of fines. ETSC would welcome this as the first step towards a point exchange system. This could then lead the way to an EU-wide Demerit Point System,” added Antonio Avenoso, ETSC Executive Director.

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¹ BESTPOINT was co-funded by DG MOVE of the European Commission. The duration of the project was 2 years, culminating in September 2012. The project was coordinated by the Austrian Road Safety Board (KfV) in collaboration with 11 European research institutes and transport authorities: BASt (Germany), CDV (Czech Republic), CERTH (Greece), DTU (Denmark), ETSC (EU), IFSTTAR (France), ITS (Poland), Malta Transport Authority, RSA (Ireland), SWOV (The Netherlands), VTT (Finland). www.bestpoint-project.eu

² Belgium, Sweden, Portugal, Slovakia, Estonia and Lithuania do not have a demerit point system in place. Malta and the Netherlands have demerit points for novice drivers only. Austria, Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands do not assign points to offences, but count the number of offences. After three offences, the licence is withdrawn.

³ Another criterion for success is that the number of points should escalate with the risk. Stricter requirements, such as a lower threshold for rehabilitation measures and licence suspension, should also be set for novice drivers. Points should be integrated into administrative penalty procedures to avoid lengthy court decisions. The DPS management should be computerised as much as possible to allow for timely, up-to-date and easily accessible information to drivers about their points' status.

More recommendations can be found in the Handbook available on http://www.bestpoint-project.eu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29&Itemid=5 together with two other background deliverables. Deliverable 1 (2011), *European Demerit Point Systems: Overview of their main features and expert opinions* and Deliverable 2 (2012), *Identification of the essential features for an effective Demerit Point System*.

⁴ Members of the European Parliament in their own initiative Report on European road safety 2011-2020 *"[e]ncourage the Member States to introduce special penalty points systems for the most dangerous offences, as the most efficient supplement to financial fines;" "[...]there is also a need for psychological measures designed to change the behaviour of road users who consistently breach traffic rules, such as the introduction throughout Europe of a harmonised points system."*

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=REPORT&reference=A7-2011-0264&language=EN>

⁵ Common EU legislation on seat belts and child safety restraints already exist.

⁶ Council Conclusions on road safety, December 2010.

http://ec.europa.eu/danmark/documents/alle_emner/transport/101202_raadet_en.pdf



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