

Survey reflects inadequacy of car inspection program

Editor's note: The following story was written as an assignment in the UNL School of Journalism Depth Reporting class. The author is a senior from Raymond.

By Debbie Ivey

Congratulations. You just left a service station where your car passed its yearly safety check with a quick once-over by an attendant who then slapped a sticker on your windshield. You got the sticker, the attendant got his \$2, and you're both happy for another year.

Happy—but authorities recall an incident last year in which a car sailed through the Nebraska Periodic Motor Vehicle Inspection (PMVI) with only a smile from the attendant. A few miles and a few minutes later the brakes failed and the car collided with a truck. The motorist doesn't visit that smiling service station attendant anymore. She's dead.

Seventeen inspection station attendants in six Southeast Nebraska cities and towns recently risked indirectly killing motorists, because, among other things, they failed to check brakes during an inspection.

The car—a 1965 Chevy II Nova, supposedly "in storage for 1½ years."

The motorist—me.

The plan—to investigate inspection stations to determine if the PMVI program is working according to the regulations established by the Nebraska Department of Motor Vehicles.

The station attendants, representing independent garages, service stations and automobile dealers, were asked to inspect my car. During the inspection, only one attendant drove the car—so he alone knew whether it even had brakes. But he didn't mention that they needed adjustment.

A mechanic who knew of my plan and who inspected the car before the investigation said both the brakes and the headlights needed adjustment. He said the car also needed a new tailpipe and tailpipe bracelet. Any one of these defects is reason for inspectors to reject the car.

"Barely meeting" inspection requirements were the two front tires (with a tread depth of 2/32-inch), the muffler and balljoints. The left turn signal was not working properly, but it did meet the standard, and the left parking light bulb was burned out. None of these could cause rejection of the car.

Results: All but one of the 17 stations violated state law by not checking the car in all 11 required areas. Such violations can bring a \$500 fine and/or six months in jail.

Despite the defects, four station attendants affixed a safety inspection approval sticker to the car. Only two made minor repairs before doing so. The attendants are subject to the same penalties.

As a result of the study, John Sullivan, the director of the Department of Motor Vehicles, said he is wondering if Nebraska should join the 10 states that have no inspection program or if the state should switch to inspections at state-run stations.

Just six months ago, he said, he was beginning to think the program was nearing success.

It can't be denied that the program has been improved in the last year. More men have been assigned to check inspection stations, training sessions and public relations films are being provided for station personnel and the public, the permits of nine stations not complying with "the provisions and spirit of the highway safety effort" have been revoked, and monthly evaluations are being completed to help improve the program.

These changes were made after a charge by the 1972 Legislature either to improve the program by 1975 or stop it.

Despite these improvements, Sullivan, Glen Eppens, (administrator of the inspection program) and Lou Kostka (supervisor of field operations for inspections and "my father" and witness during the investigation) all expressed concern about the program's continuation because of my survey. They also agreed, however, that inspections had improved since 1969.

"Two years ago, all 17 would have slapped a sticker on the windshield," Sullivan said. He noted that only four passed the car and that only one of those four could be accused of "sticker slapping."

It is also true, however, that 16 of the stations not only broke the law, but unfairly collected my \$2 (since I did not receive the full inspection) and failed to alert me to danger.

For \$2, I received inspections that varied from three to 20 minutes. But only one of the 17 stations did the thorough job required by law. How serious are these results?

The Motor Vehicles Department apparently thinks they are quite serious since it contacted each of the stations after I conducted my survey. It reprimanded and issued citations to all but one. And it began revocation proceedings on the permits of two or three stations.

Before the results of the investigation could be reported, the department said it planned to launch a control program using the same approach I took, in which Department personnel will visit every inspection station in the state.

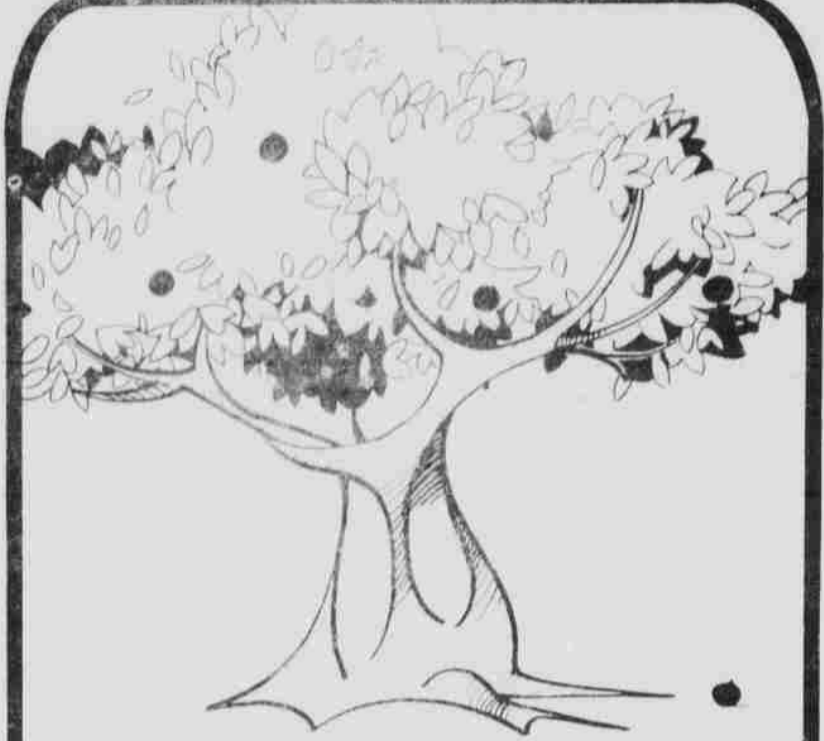
Is there an explanation for "sticker slapping" and sloppy inspections?

Several station manager and employees said they get only \$1.75 for each inspection, which they claim is not enough to merit a thorough job. Stations in most other states with inspection programs, however, receive less than that for inspections. In fact, several receive only 75 cents.

Fear of losing a regular customer by requiring repairs was another explanation.

Station managers also complained that they know the requirements, but don't have enough trained personnel to do the inspections properly.

See Gas stations, Page 2.



FEED YOUR HEAD

The Whole NU Catalog Group Invites You To Contribute Evaluations of The Exceptional Courses You've Had.

Whole NU Catalog

Whole NU Catalog to list 'good' courses

Psst! What's a good course to take second semester?

The Whole NU Catalog, to be distributed Oct. 10, will offer about 80 answers to that question, according to a group compiling the list of "good" courses the booklet is to include.

In part, the general idea of the catalog is to bypass the hit and miss approach students commonly use in selecting courses, the group said at a meeting Tuesday.

When asked how the catalog will differ from customary college bulletins, which offer token descriptions of courses, Vernon Williams replied, "How does night differ from day?" Williams, a faculty member connected with the project, is director of the Counseling Center.

The big difference is that students will tell fellow students which courses they found valuable, according to Marty Winkler, a student member of the group.

"We hope students have had courses they feel are really worth recommending," Winkler said.

The format of the booklet was borrowed from the Whole Earth Catalog, which describes alternate life styles. Although the catalog title includes the term NU, only UNL courses are to be listed.

Students can describe courses they found worthwhile on forms attached to yellow and brown posters, which were tacked up today and are headlined "Feed Your Head." The recommendations are to be photographed and reproduced in their entirety, mistakes and all. For this reason, respondents are asked to use an electric typewriter to type recommendations or to print them in black ink.

The Oct. 10 target date for distribution of the catalogs correlates with second semester registration beginning Oct. 17. About 10,000 copies of the eight-page tabloid are to be printed, and the group anticipates enough response to list at least 80 course recommendations. If more than 80 listings are received, the group plans to expand the booklet. If space permits, duplicate descriptions will be printed.

Names of persons offering course information will not be included on the reproduced recommendations.

The group indicated the major obstacle it now faces is time. If the projected distribution date is to be met, recommendations must be submitted by next Wednesday.

Dropoff boxes are to be placed around the Nebraska Union and in the Daily Nebraskan office, Union 34. Respondents also can mail the information to the Center for Educational Change (CEC) office, Union 338.

About \$200 is budgeted for the project. Vince Boucher, CEC co-chairperson, said CEC would pay as much as \$100 for the project. CEC is a subcommittee of ASUN. Vernon Williams said the Teaching and Learning Center would pick up the rest of the tab.

The idea for the catalog was one of several spawned during a session of last spring's Wilderness Workshop, in which a of faculty and students brainstormed in an attempt to improve teaching in the College of Arts and Sciences.

Doug Blomgren, another student member of the group compiling the catalog, said he hopes the catalog will be updated in coming years "and become an ongoing thing."

Blomgren also noted the booklets would be distributed where registration materials are placed "and by hand if necessary."

