

Roadworthy: Drive for safety

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Dubai: New taxi drivers may have to undergo a one-year probationary period of driving accident free or face non-renewal of their contracts with the Roads and Transport Authority (RTA), XPRESS has learnt.

A new study conducted by the Sweden Traffic Safety Institute has recommended the probation measure for Dubai's taxi drivers to stem traffic offences and accidents committed by new drivers who may not have the proper skills and experience to drive in a city they are just getting to know.

According to the RTA's latest internal Almasar magazine, it is suggested that "drivers be allowed to exercise the profession for one year only. If, during this time period the driver commits no offence or traffic accidents, he will be eligible to obtain a renewal for one further year and so on."

However, if a new driver's record at the end of the year shows offences, "he will have to be requalified" to stay employed in Dubai. The RTA's bulletin stated the study suggests there should be short driving courses and a "balanced combination of drivers working in the sector according to their nationalities."

Big Numbers

There are 5,490 taxi drivers working for Dubai Taxi alone who share shifts on 3,236 taxis owned by the RTA. There are a further 7,000 drivers working for four other privately-operated taxi companies – National, Cars, Metro and Arabia – in Dubai.

Higher levels of training and scrutiny of taxi drivers could reduce traffic accidents and offences, according to the study.

Figures in the RTA publication show there were 4,897 traffic accidents involving Dubai Taxi drivers and their 3,236 vehicles in the first six months of 2008.

A further 6,014 accidents were reported during the same period by the other four taxi firms in Dubai. Abdul Aziz Malek, CEO, Dubai Taxi Corporation, could not be reached for comments. The RTA noted, however, that there were 0.04 accidents for every 100,000 trips during the second half of 2009. The surge in traffic offences by taxi drivers “is obviously and undoubtedly conflicting with the RTA’s vision of “Safe and Smooth Transport for all,” according to Almasar.