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A study by the INSEE minimizes the role of radar

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A sign announcing the presence of a radar near the beltway in Bordeaux. Photo: Patrick Bernard, French Press Agency.

The INSEE (French Office of Statistics and Economic Studies) has just published a 30-page study entitled “The local impact of fixed radar on traffic accidents: an important effect after installation but reduced in the long term”. Two statisticians, Sébastien Roux and Philippe Zamora, investigated the impact of radar over time. They show that the installation of fixed radar in communities of less than 6000 inhabitants “lowers by 13-17% the number of accidents involving bodily injury and by 50-75% the number of fatalities, in the first months following their installation.” But “this effect decreases after six months, although it remains substantial—a reduction of 11% for accidents and 25-50% for fatalities, compared with a situation without fixed radar.”

The investigators maintain that, in the long term, there is a “progressive reduction of the effect of local, fixed radar”, whose installation becomes to be known by drivers. They estimate that the installation of radar in communities did not prevent more than “740 deaths, 2750 grave injuries, and 2230 grave accidents between 2003 and 2011”. This contradicts another evaluation, published recently in Accident Analysis and Prevention, the international review of reference in the area of highway safety research. According to this publication, radar has permitted the prevention of 15,000 fatal accidents and 62,000 non-fatal accidents between November 2003 and December 2010.

Highway Safety has not reacted to this study, published by Le Parisien 3 December. Chantal Perrichon, president of the League against Highway Violence, deplores this and has claimed for months that there

is “a cell of retaliation”. “We would like to know what must be thought of this study which goes contrary to all that we know in the area of highway safety,” she explains.