

Cheaper Background Checks Put 'Ridesharing' Passengers at Greater Risk

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In most major cities in the United States, taxicab drivers are required to purchase background checks conducted by law enforcement agencies such as police departments and the FBI. These background checks include fingerprinting, nationwide searches and automatic updating.

Since so-called "ridesharing" services uberX, Lyft and Sidecar do not comply with established taxicab regulations, they therefore choose "do-it-yourself" third-party background checks which are cheaper and less effective.

"Exclusive: Uber driver accused of assault had done prison time for a felony, passed background check anyways"

—PandoDaily (Jan. 6, 2014)

Uber's background checks have notoriously resulted in two convicted felons discovered driving for its "ridesharing" division uberX. In the first case, an [uberX driver facing a second felony conviction](#) allegedly assaulted a passenger. In a second case, the [Chicago Tribune discovered a convicted felon driving for uberX](#). After the [Chicago Tribune](#) story, Uber [apologized and announced](#) it was taking steps to fix the problem.

The problem with Uber "fixing" its background checks is that its third-party background checks will never equal the quality of publicly regulated, law enforcement implemented background checks. Their checks do not report information from all US Courts and only provide convictions in most cases for a fixed number of years, seven to ten. Typically, taxicab companies are required to use "Live Scan," a fingerprint-based background check of drivers filtered through the Department of Justice and FBI systems that have no time based or jurisdictional limitations. Most importantly, Live Scan automatically updates its results, meaning that

"Uber expands driver record checks, but new system would have missed fatal accident driver"

—San Francisco Business Times (Mar. 13, 2014)

drivers who commit crimes after being initially cleared are caught by this system. All results of these background checks are then sent to regulatory agencies. "Ridesharing" companies, which choose to operate outside of regulation, do not even have the necessary agreements in place with government agencies to allow these checks to happen in the first place. Nationwide reports that are run by third party vendors only report from courts that release conviction information to the vendor. This does not cover all courts in the United States. Furthermore, there are no regulations that say whether a driver is eligible or not based on their criminal record.

"Ridesharing" companies Uber, Lyft and Sidecar don't comply with the same level of regulatory oversight as traditional taxicabs. Currently, they either ignore local taxi regulations or benefit from "regulation lite," as is the case with California's two-track system of regulation. Given this leeway, "ridesharing" companies cut their costs, thereby increasing their profits at the expense of public safety. They choose cheaper third-party background checks which do not automatically update when a driver is convicted of a crime. This is just another way in which "ridesharing" companies skirt costs that directly impact public safety.

"Uber admits its scrutiny of drivers' pasts missed convictions"

—Chicago Tribune (Feb. 14, 2014)

'Who's Driving You?' is a public safety campaign designed to educate the public about the dangers of unregulated transportation services. It is an initiative of the Taxicab, Limousine & Paratransit Association, an international non-profit trade association whose membership consists of 1,100 regulated transportation companies. For more information, visit

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