

What You Should Know About:

► *Impaired Driving*

National Statistics

Drunk driving is known in some states as DUI (driving under the influence), DWI (driving while intoxicated) and OWI (operating while intoxicated). Regardless of what you choose to call it, impaired driving continues to be a major public health problem. In 2002, NHTSA estimated that 35% of all traffic deaths occurred in crashes in which at least one driver or nonoccupant had a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.08 percent or more and that any alcohol was present in 41% of all fatal crashes in 2002.¹ Nearly two-thirds of children under 15 who died in alcohol-related crashes between 1985 and 1996 were riding with a drinking driver. More than two-thirds of the drinking drivers were old enough to be the parent of the child who was killed, and fewer than 20% of the children killed were properly restrained at the time of the crash.²



Blood alcohol concentration is the standard measure of intoxication. A BAC of 0.10% means a level of 0.10 grams of pure alcohol per 100 milliliters of the person's blood. As BAC increases, coordination, reasoning, and balance decrease. On average, alcohol is metabolized by the liver at the rate of one drink per hour. A BAC as low as 0.02% has been shown to affect driving ability.³ The probability of a crash begins to increase significantly at 0.05% BAC and climbs rapidly after about 0.08%.³ For most people, a BAC of 0.05% requires only three or more drinks in an hour.

The economic costs of alcohol-related crashes in 2000 alone were more than \$51 billion. Included in these costs are lost productivity, medical costs, legal and court costs, emergency service costs, insurance administration costs, travel delay, property damage, and workplace losses.⁴

Drunk driving is not just an adult problem. It is involved in one-fifth of motor vehicle-related child fatalities and serious injuries.^{5,6} Alcohol involvement in crashes peaks at night and is higher on weekends.^{3,7}

From 1991-2001, intoxication rates decreased for drivers in all age groups involved in fatal crashes,⁷ however, that progress has stalled in recent years.⁸ Alcohol involvement continues to contribute to a significant number of motor vehicle crashes among teenagers.^{6,9}

Did You Know?

**One 12-ounce can of most beers,
One 4-ounce service of most wines,
and
One cocktail made with 1.2-ounce
of 80-proof spirits contain identical
amounts of alcohol.**

Oklahoma Statistics

From 1992 through 2001, the Oklahoma Office of the Chief Medical Examiner performed BACs on 79% of the traffic fatalities among persons older than 14 years of age; 38% of those tested had positive BACs. Forty-seven percent of males tested had a positive BAC compared to 22% of females. Sixty-one percent of Native Americans tested had a positive BAC compared to 38% of African Americans and 36% of whites. Alcohol is a factor in 24% of Oklahoma crash costs.¹⁰ Alcohol-related crashes in Oklahoma cost the public more than \$1.4 billion in 1999, including more than \$0.6 billion in monetary costs and almost \$0.8 billion in quality of life losses. People other than the drinking driver paid \$0.9 billion of the alcohol-related crash bill. Alcohol-related crashes account for an estimated 18% of Oklahoma's auto insurance payments. Reducing alcohol-related crashes by 10% would save \$28 million in claims payments and loss adjustment expenses.¹⁰

► What Works

Lowering the Legal BAC Limit

Scientific evidence shows that driving skills begin to deteriorate markedly at 0.05 BAC.³ In Oklahoma, the legal BAC limit is 0.08. Lowering the legal BAC limit to between 0.05 and 0.08 has proven successful in reducing alcohol-related MVC injuries in many states.^{11,12} The American Medical Association and many experts have called for lowering the legal definition of impaired driving to 0.05.

Administrative License Revocation Law (ALR)

Prompt suspension of the driver's licenses of people who drive while intoxicated is an effective measure for preventing impaired driving.

Oklahoma currently has a law that requires the immediate surrender of a driver's license if the driver refuses to submit to a chemical test or if the test records a BAC greater than 0.08. Refusal to be tested results in a 6-month license suspension; a BAC greater than 0.10 results in a 90-day suspension. Studies have shown that ALR laws have been associated with a statistically significant decrease in fatal crashes.¹³

Enforcement of Minimum Legal Drinking Age Laws

In Oklahoma, a person must be 21 years of age to purchase alcohol. Increasing the minimum age for alcohol purchase to 21 has been shown to decrease the number of fatal alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes among teenagers.¹¹ However, injury prevention specialists across the country agree that for the law to be effective, it must be enforced.

Implementation of "Zero Tolerance" Laws for Persons Under 21

Oklahoma currently has a "zero tolerance" law, which prohibits drivers less than 21 years of age from driving with any measurable amount of alcohol (usually above 0.02) in their system. A zero tolerance law allows a law enforcement official to require a breath test from a driver less than 21 years if the officer has probable cause to believe the driver has been drinking. If the driver refuses the test or the test reveals any measurable alcohol level, then the driver is subject to sanctions, including loss of his or her driver's license.¹¹

Sobriety Checkpoints

Sobriety checkpoints are designed to systematically stop drivers to assess their level of alcohol impairment. The goal is to deter alcohol-impaired driving by increasing the perceived risk of arrest. Sobriety checkpoints have been effective in reducing alcohol-impaired driving, alcohol-related crashes, and associated fatal and nonfatal injuries in a variety of settings and among various populations.¹¹



Dram Shop Laws

Dram shop laws make liable persons who serve alcoholic beverages to minors or to persons already "obviously" or "visibly" intoxicated. Using undercover police officers to enforce Oklahoma's law against serving alcohol to intoxicated bar and restaurant patrons would reduce alcohol-related crash fatalities and save an estimated \$20 per licensed driver.⁴

Server Training and Designated Driver Programs

Server training programs teach waiters, waitresses, and bartenders how to identify customers who are already intoxicated so they can avoid serving intoxicated customers. High-quality, face-to-face training, when accompanied by strong management support, is effective in reducing the level of intoxication among patrons.¹¹

► What You Can Do

Actively Enforce Laws Related to Impaired Driving

Local law enforcement agencies should actively enforce all laws associated with impaired driving, including: a) the Administrative License Revocation Law; b) minimum legal drinking age law; c) zero tolerance law; and d) dram shop laws.

Conduct Workshops

Communities should conduct workshops for judges and prosecutors to help familiarize them with the current Oklahoma laws and problems associated with impaired driving.

Increase Community Awareness of Costs

Communities should educate residents about the costs of drunk driving and the benefits of a lower BAC law.

► Where You Can Go

The following organizations can provide information about reducing alcohol-related crashes as well as links to other organizations and web sites.

State

- Oklahoma Highway Safety Office
405/523-1570
www.dps.state.ok.us/ohso
- Injury Prevention Service
Oklahoma State Department of Health
405/271-3430
www.health.state.ok.us/PROGRAM/injury

National

- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
www.nhtsa.dot.gov
- National Center for Injury Prevention and Control
www.cdc.gov/ncipc
- Insurance Institute for Highway Safety
www.iihs.org

Local

Highway Patrol
Police Department

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