

NEWS RELEASE

Tougher measures for drink drivers as France sets new safety goals

2 December 2008, Paris – With the recent reduction in mean speeds on French roads, drink driving has become the main cause of fatal crashes in France ahead of speeding⁽¹⁾. At the Safe and Sober Talk held today in Paris by ETSC⁽²⁾ and the French NGO *Association Prévention Routière*⁽³⁾, experts looked at the recently proposed measures which must reverse the situation.

While overall alcohol consumption decreased by more than 10% between 2001 and 2005 in France, the percentage of drivers above the legal BAC (Blood Alcohol Content) limit (0.5 g/l) remained stable. Even though it is estimated to be quite low, between 1% and 2%, this small group of drivers is responsible for disproportionately high 25% of all road deaths in the country⁽⁴⁾. Contrary to what is generally believed, the young people are not behind the majority of alcohol-related accidents; drivers from all age groups share the blame for taking the wheel when drunk.

Earlier this year France set itself a new target of 3,000 road deaths by 2012 to bring it 35% down from 4,620 in 2007. Moving in this direction, the French police have recently increased the number of preventative breath tests on the roads: from 7.9 million in 2004 to just over 9 million in 2005 and 2006. However, police enforcement alone cannot solve the drink driving problem.

A set of new road safety legislation has been proposed by the French government earlier this year. It includes combating drink driving through the introduction of alcolock rehabilitation programmes, installing alcolocks in all school buses from the start of 2009 school year, and car confiscation for serious and repeat offenders.

Rehabilitation programmes will be introduced with the installation of mandatory alcolocks for a fixed period for drink drivers. Dr. Charles Mercier-Guyon, a Member of Medical Council of *Prévention Routière*, said: *"In our pilot programme in the department of Haute-Savoie, run by Prévention Routière in collaboration with the Court of Annecy, we showed an 80% reduction in recidivism amongst the participants. Rolling this out to the rest of France would hopefully reduce drink driving all over the country."*

In order to target the youngest driver group, it has been proposed to install 'alcotests' at night clubs and to prohibit the sale of alcohol in all petrol stations 24 hours a day. At present the sale is only allowed between 6 am and 10 pm.

France enjoys a high level of political leadership, efficient interministerial cooperation and strong public support for its road safety initiatives. Speaking at the event, ETSC Policy Director Ellen Townsend said: *"The combination of these factors have enabled France to set up its cutting-edge automated speed management system and drastically bring down speed violations over the past years. With alcohol replacing speed as the key cause of road death, France must again show the way to other countries in Europe."*

Notes to Editors:

- (1) Observatoire National Interministériel de Sécurité Routière (ONISR,) *La sécurité routière en France, Bilan de l'année 2007.*
- (2) **The European Transport Safety Council (ETSC)** is a Brussels-based independent non-profit making organisation dedicated to the reduction of the number and severity of transport crashes in Europe. The ETSC seeks to identify and promote research-based measures with a high safety potential. It brings together 41 national and international organisations concerned with transport safety from across Europe. www.etsc.be
- (3) Since its creation in 1949, **Prévention Routière** has built up and fostered relations with over 36,000 local communities in France acting through its extensive regional network. www.preventionroutiere.asso.fr
- (4) According to *Observatoire National Interministériel de Sécurité Routière* (ONISR)