

Time to Halt Drink Driving Amongst Europe's Young Citizens

10 April 2008, Brussels – Today the European Transport Safety Council⁽¹⁾ (ETSC) will launch a new Policy Paper⁽²⁾ on what can be done to prevent young people from drink driving at its Transport Safety Dinner. Here stakeholders including the police, the European Commission and road safety experts will debate the consequences of drink driving amongst young people. Young novice drivers are particularly at risk when driving under the influence of alcohol. Nonetheless to date the EU has undertaken little to combat this problem.

The age group of 16-24 year old drivers are greatly over-represented in crash and road death statistics, with risks a factor 2 to 3 times higher than those of more experienced drivers⁽³⁾. The high levels of young driver risk result in principle from factors of inexperience, immaturity and lifestyles associated with their age and gender. Even when their Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) is not high, young drink drivers are more likely to be involved in crashes than older drivers with similar BACs. Drink driving is particularly dangerous for youngsters as their tolerance of alcohol is lower, their bodies are not used to consuming it. Driving is more demanding for young novice drivers than for other drivers: as they need to pay more attention to their driving task and the disrupting effect of alcohol is greater than for drivers with more experience. Alcohol reduces inhibition: as young people possess less developed self-control mechanisms. Finally, they suffer a stronger euphoric and emotional impact from alcohol⁽⁴⁾.

To stop the spread of drink driving, a BAC limit of maximum 0.2 g/l for novice drivers must be introduced throughout the EU in line with the EU Recommendation (2001)⁽⁵⁾. Only such low limits will bring about significant reductions in alcohol-related road deaths. Alongside lower limits, it is essential that young and novice drivers are subject to special police enforcement actions. *"A zero BAC level will work only if combined with effective "young driver enforcement" and targeted communication campaigns,"* said Ad Hellemons from the Dutch National Police Agency at the debate.

"The EU should introduce legislation so that all Member States apply low BAC levels of 0.2 or even lower for young drivers" said Antonio Avenoso, Executive Director of ETSC. *"The new proposed Directive on Cross Border Enforcement⁽⁶⁾ should also raise the profile of the need to undertake high levels of police checks to deter drink driving amongst all ages including the young."*

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Notes to Editors:

- (1) 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 39 national and international organisations concerned with transport safety from across Europe. www.etsc.be
- (2) ETSC 2008: Drink Driving: Young Drivers and Recidivist Offenders. Brussels, Belgium. www.etsc.be
- (3) OECD/ECMT 2006: Young Drivers. The Road to Safety. Paris, France
- (4) ERSO Novice Drivers. Retrieved January, 20, 2008. www.erso.eu.
- (5) European Commission 2001: Recommendation on the maximum permitted blood alcohol content (BAC) for drivers of motorised vehicles. http://eur-lex.europa.eu/smartapi/cgi/sga_doc?smartapi!celexplus!prod!CELEXnumdoc&numdoc=32001H0115&lg=en
- (6) European Commission 2008: Proposal for a Directive on cross border enforcement in the field of road safety
http://ec.europa.eu/transport/roadsafety_library/enforcement/com_2008_0151_en.pdf