

Introduction

The Italian Government adopted a National Road Safety Plan (PNSS) in 2002 and set the target of a 40% reduction of road deaths by 2010¹. The target was then revised to take up the EU objective of 50% reduction. Italy only managed to cut road deaths between 2001-2009 by 43% with 4,050 deaths in 2009². However, the Italian government isn't letting up the pressure. In fact, it approved in July 2010 a new legislation to tackle road risk. Stricter measures have been introduced to fight drink driving which is still one of the main causes of death in Italy, and special attention has been dedicated to young and novice drivers. The legislation has already entered into force, and it is hoped it will reduce further the number of casualties on Italian roads.

Extent of Drink Driving Problem

In spite of the general road death reduction in Italy deaths attributable to drink driving have increased by about 10% on average each year. In 2000 out of 7,096 casualties only 103 were reported as caused by Drink Driving, whereas in 2008 out of 4,739 road deaths 204 were due to alcohol abuse³. This is a considerably high number but still underestimated if Health Ministry's figures are taken into account. ISS (the Italian Health Institute) says that 30% of the car accident are alcohol correlated.

Perception of the Problem

According to a Eurobarometer survey⁴, Italians unanimously consider driving under the influence of alcohol one of the major safety problems, and 74% of the people interviewed believe that the national government should do more about it. The new measures introduced by the new legislation focus extensively on drink driving, and shall therefore be welcomed by the whole population.

The new Legislation

The Italian law n. 120, 29/07/2010⁵ modifies the previous legislation on road safety, introducing tougher sanctions to tackle drink driving especially amongst novice⁶ and professional drivers, and it has been approved by the Senate with 145 votes in favor and 122 abstentions.

Zero Alcohol Tolerance for young, novice, and professional drivers.

In response to the Commission Recommendation to introduce a special BAC limit of maximum 0.2 g/l for young and novice drivers, the Italian legislator replaced the previous BAC 0.5 g/l with a BAC 0.0 g/l limit for young and novice drivers, and also for professional drivers. The zero alcohol tolerance provision has been enforced on Italian roads since the 13th of August. If found with a BAC between 0.0 and 0.5 g/l, drivers will get a monetary sanction of € 155-624 plus 5 penalty points. Moreover, in case of road accidents, the penalties will be doubled. The new legislation also allows employers to fire professional drivers who were caught drunk at work. Finally, the new law requires novice and professional drivers who had their license revoked to wait five years before applying for a new driver's license.

¹ Baseline year taken from an average of 1999, 2000, and 2001.

² These data are estimated. They will be formalised by the end of 2010.

³ 4th Road Safety PIN Report, <http://www.etsc.eu/documents/ETSC%204th%20PIN%20Report%202010.pdf>

⁴ Flash Eurobarometer 301, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_301_en.pdf

⁵ Published on the supplement n. 171 of the Official Journal n. 175 of the 29/07/2010. <http://gazzette.comune.jesi.an.it/2010/175/5.htm>

⁶ According to the legislation, a novice driver is a person in the first three years after getting a driving license.

Unmodified BAC limit but stricter sanctions for everyone

For the rest of the driving population the ordinary BAC limit remains at 0.5 g/l, however monetary sanctions have been increased by approximately one third, and so has the number of points withdrawn. Drivers with a BAC higher than 1.5 g/l can now be jailed for at least 6 months, whereas previously 3 months was the minimum penalty, and their license will in any case be revoked. The Italian legislator also introduced an important provision that makes tests on alcohol and drug abuse a condition to obtain the license. Finally, recidivists with 3 serious violations (at least 5 penalty points each) in less than 2 years will have to sit the driving theory test again.

Moped Riders

Even moped riders under 18 can be now tested for alcohol, and if they are caught with a BAC over 0.0 g/l they will not only be sanctioned right away but they will also have to wait an additional year before getting their full license. If their BAC is over 0.5 g/l they will have to wait three years before being able to sit their driver's license exam. Finally, starting from January 2011, in addition to the theoretical test, a practical riding test will also be introduced in order to get a driving license for mopeds.

Alcohol and Public Places

According to the new norms selling alcohol will be prohibited between 3 and 6 AM. On motorways spirits will be banned from 10 PM, whereas beer and wine cannot be sold after 2 AM. Finally, alcohol tests shall be made available by owners of restaurants, pubs, and discos to all customers.

Drink Driving Enforcement

There was an evident increase in road-side alcohol Police checks over the past few years. In 2006 it was estimated that only 250,000 breath tests were made whereas, according to the Italian Police, in 2009 the tests were over 1,800,000. The progress is impressive but far beyond the EU average. Enforcement in Italy should be enhanced, and hopefully more funds will be soon available for local authorities.

New source of funding for road safety

The new legislation provides a new source of funding for police road checks. Municipalities will have to earmark at least 50% of the income from fines to initiatives aiming at improving road safety, such as financing police road checks and improving infrastructure. Local Authorities will have to submit an annual report to the Ministry of Transport.

Fines and Deferred payment

With an annual income lower than € 10,629 drivers will be able to obtain a deferred payment as long as the amount of the fine is € 200 or higher. A shorter period of time is established for the notification of fines, 90 days instead of 150.

3 hour bonus

Drivers who had their license suspended can ask the Prefect a permission of maximum three hours per day to drive to/from work or to perform essential activities. However, if the permission is granted, the length of the suspension will be prolonged and there will be no opportunity to appeal against the sanction.

Awareness

In 2009 the Ministry of Youth financed a campaign called “Operazione Naso rosso” (Operation Red Nose) that involved owners and security personnel of several discos across the country. Information and free alcohol tests were made available to all young drivers with the aim of raising public awareness about the dangers of drinking and driving.

Designated Driver Campaigns have also been carried out in the past years by road safety organisations (such as the ANIA Foundation for Road Safety) in cooperation with discos’ personnel, producers of alcoholic drinks, and local authorities.

In 2009 the Ministry of Youth financed a campaign called “Operazione Naso rosso” (Operation Red Nose) that involved owners and security personnel of several discos across the country. Information and free alcohol tests were made available to all young drivers with the aim of raising public awareness about the dangers of drinking and driving.

Designated Driver Campaigns have also been carried out in the past years by road safety organisations (such as the ANIA Foundation for Road Safety) in cooperation with discos’ personnel, producers of alcoholic drinks, and local authorities.

European Transport Safety Council

Avenue des Celtes 20

B-1040 Brussels

Tel. +32 2 230 4106 - Fax. +32 2 230 4215

E-mail: information@etsc.eu - Internet: www.etsc.eu