

## Drink Driving and Young and Novice Drivers

### Large Proportion of Young People Die on the Roads

Road accidents are the single biggest killer of 15-24 year olds in OECD countries (ERSO 2006). In most EU countries, young people are far more likely to be victims of road collisions than people in any other age group. They account for a large part of road victims (Tab. 1): 20.4% of all persons killed in road accidents in 2006 were aged 16-24 years old, whereas only 11.4% of the population falls within this age group.

**Table 1: Road deaths age 16-24 by country, in percent (2006)**

	% of road deaths
Austria	21.5
Belgium	19.9
Czech Republic	18.5
Denmark	26.1
Estonia	19.1
Finland	24.7
France	25.2
Greece	20.2
Hungary	11.7
Ireland (2003)	27.6
Italy (2004)	18.3
Luxembourg (2002)	21.0
Malta	36.4
Netherlands (2003)	22.0
Poland (2005)	19.3
Portugal	13.9
Spain	17.3
Sweden	20.4
UK (GB 2006+NI 2005)	26.3

Source: ERSO 2008

In general, 16-24 year old drivers are greatly overrepresented in crash and road death statistics, with a risk factor 2 to 3 times higher than those of more experienced drivers (ERSO 2006). The rate of young men is often even higher (SWOV 2007). They pose a greater risk to themselves, their passengers and to other road users compared to other drivers. The high levels of young driver risk result in principle from factors of inexperience, immaturity and lifestyles associated with their age and gender. In addition to their social and biological immaturity and their lack of driving experience, young drivers are often driving under the influence of alcohol. Even when their BACs are not high, young drink drivers are involved in accidents at higher rates than older drivers with similar BACs (NIAAA 1996).

### How does Drink Driving affect Young People?

Drink driving is particularly dangerous for youngsters due to several reasons (ERSO 2006):

- Their tolerance of alcohol is lower, as their body is not used to its consumption.
- Driving is more demanding for young novice drivers than for other drivers; i.e. as they need to pay more attention to their driving task, 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, they suffer a stronger euphoric and emotional impact from alcohol.
- Studies have shown that youngsters tend to underestimate their actual level of intoxication.
- Moreover, illicit drug use is on the increase amongst youngsters, in principle resulting in increased crash risk. Particularly the combined use of alcohol and drugs leads to extreme high crash risks.

### Countermeasures to Prevent Drink Driving Among Young People

#### 1. Special alcohol limits

As the crash rate for young drivers significantly starts to rise at very low levels, special legal levels of BAC are effective for young and inexperienced drivers. The European Commission recognises this in its Recommendation to Member States

by asking them to introduce a special BAC limit of maximum 0.2 g/l for young and novice drivers. At present Austria, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Spain have lower drink driving limits for young and novice drivers.

Zero and low BAC levels have consistently been shown to reduce alcohol related traffic deaths among youth. A systematic review of the impact of lower BAC laws for young or inexperienced drivers found that the three studies that examined fatal crash outcomes reported declines of 24%, 17%, and 9%; the two studies that examined injury crash outcomes reported declines of 17% and 4%; and the one study that examined crashes in which the investigating police officer believed that the driver had been drinking alcohol reported a decline of 11% (Shults et al 2001). Starting from a BAC level of 0.8 g/l, it has been shown that only lowering to 0 or 0.2 g/l was effective, and that lowering BAC levels to 0.4 or 0.6 g/l did not produce significant reductions in alcohol-related road deaths (Hingson et al. 1994). A maximum BAC level of 0 to 0.2 g/l, linked to severe repercussions or high demerit point loss as a result of contraventions, could contribute much towards lowering young driver risk (ERSO 2006).

## 2. Licensing regimes

The general aim of licensing regimes is to exclude individuals with insufficient driving ability and competence (OECD/ECMT 2006). Licensing systems are based on laws and regulations referring to the requirements for being licensed (e.g. age, driving aptitude), the quality of licenses (e.g. restrictions), the administrative procedures for licensing (e.g. licensing, withdrawal) and fitness to drive. Systems differ more or less regarding the items that are tested, the formal procedures and the institutions within the system (ERSO 2006). In general, two categories of licensing systems can be distinguished: first of all traditional and probationary licensing systems and secondly graduated licensing systems.

## 3. Traditional and probationary licensing systems

In these systems, drivers are fully licensed after passing a driver test, and no special conditions apply to novice drivers. Thus, traditional licensing systems are often called "single-phase licensing systems" (OECD/ECMT 2006). Most countries using these systems have also introduced a probationary period, which could include restrictions such as zero BAC. Moreover, some countries use "two-phase licensing systems", in which candidates get a provisional license after having completed a first phase, allowing them to drive solo. Only after completing a second phase of theory and testing, the full license is acquired (ERSO 2006).

## 4. Graduated licensing systems

These systems allow new drivers to acquire driving experience under low risk conditions. Graduated licensing systems (GDL) are primarily designed to address the inexperience component of young and novice drivers' crash risk but target also risk-taking behavior, which can result from age-related factors (OECD/ECMT 2006). GDL systems are usually divided into three stages: "learner", "provisional", and "fully licensed". Support and restrictions are reduced from stage to stage. With growing experience, more driving privileges are phased in gradually. Most evaluations on the impact of GDL systems have shown that these systems report significant reductions in crashes and road deaths (ERSO 2006).

## 5. Drink driving enforcement

Enforcement plays a key role in preventing drink driving. Random and targeted breath testing (RBT) is an effective technique to combat drink driving. In this method drivers are selected purely on the basis of chance and during periods respectively at locations where high alcohol use is expected (e.g. night times and discotheques). RBT increases subjective perception of the possibility of being caught, which affects their drinking and/or driving behaviour. However, according to the SARTRE 3 study, enforcement activity is fairly low across Europe (SARTRE 2004). In this survey, which was conducted in 23 European countries, only 29% of drivers said they had been tested for alcohol over the last three years, whereas 71% of drivers said they had not been tested during the same period.

## 6. Designated driver Programs

A designated driver can be defined as a person at a social gathering who promises to abstain from alcohol so he/she can ensure that others arrive home safely (Ditter et al 2005). Some other definitions employ a risk and harm reduction strategy, in which the primary goal is not necessarily abstinence, but to keep the designated driver's blood alcohol content (BAC) at less than the legal limit (Anderson 2007). Since the 1980s, designated driver programs aimed at reducing alcohol-impaired driving have been widely implemented and promoted in the United States (Ditter et al 2005). In Europe, a designated driver program (the BOB campaign) originated in Belgium in 1995. This was co-financed for a period of 5 years by the European Commission. A total of fourteen countries participated in the last year it was run at a European level. Many countries still run this campaign at a national level and local initiatives also promote the concept.

Designated driver programs are appealing because they are viewed as simple, voluntary, inexpensive, widely applicable, requiring a modest behavioral change, and as translating easily into mass media campaigns to change social norms. Especially the BOB campaign has resulted in widespread recognition and acceptance of the designated driver concept by the general public.

A systematic review was conducted by Ditter et al to assess the evidence of effectiveness of designated driver programs for reducing alcohol-impaired driving and alcohol-related crashes (Ditter et al. 2005). They differentiated between population-based campaigns (i.e. the concept of the campaign is promoted through the mass media) and incentive programs (i.e. campaigns offer free incentives to people in drinking establishments). They only found one evaluation on a designated driver programme that was based on the propagation of this idea via the media (population-based campaign), like the Bob-programmes in Europe. This was the "Pick-a-Skipper" campaign in Western Australia. Telephone survey results indicated a 13% increase in respondents "always" selecting a designated driver, but no significant change in self-reported alcohol-impaired driving or riding with an alcohol impaired driver (Boots & Midford 1999). It is very difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of designated driver programmes. At present due to the small effect sizes observed, and the limitations of the outcome measures, the present evidence is insufficient to draw any conclusions about the effectiveness of either type of designated driver promotion program evaluated.

## ETSC Policy Recommendations

### The EU should:

- legislate to introduce a limit of maximum 0.2 BAC limit for novice drivers;
- include in its future research activities a priority action to evaluate the impact of designated driver programmes such as the BOB;
- continue their support of NGOs addressing drinking and driving amongst young people and should especially facilitate their extension in the New Member States;
- work towards an appropriate labeling of alcohol to draw attention of young people to the consequences of drinking and driving.

### Member States should:

- work towards setting a legal BAC limit of no more than 0.2 g/l for young novice drivers;
- ensure that young novice drivers should be subject to probationary periods in conjunction with higher demerit points which can be assigned for non-compliance with road rules.

## Survey Results from Young People in the EU on Drink Driving

Drink driving was evaluated as the most dangerous of driving behaviours in all countries in a recent survey (autumn 2008) which polled approximately 4,800 young drivers aged between 18 and 25 in 8 EU countries: Germany, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, UK and Sweden. The survey was commissioned by the French Association Prévention Routière and the French Insurers (FFSA). Between 1% (Sweden) and 16% (France and Italy) drove after one or two alcoholic drinks during or returning from an evening out. Again between 1% (Sweden) and 10% (Italy) drove after more than two drinks either during or returning from an evening out. Average distances for an evening out vary between 37 and 46 km. When asked if they systematically designate a driver when they are out for an evening between 49% (Italy) and 28% (the Netherlands) always do and between 16% (Italy) and 5% Poland never do. During the last 12 months drivers were reported to have been checked for drink driving at least once: highest levels in Spain (40%) and lowest levels in the UK (8%). Between 23% (France) and 4% (UK) have checked their alcohol levels with an alcotest before driving. Young people support as a top priority the development of public transport for getting home (81-90%) and second more police controls (75-85%).

## Campaigns and Actions targeting Young People

**Nuits Européens Sans Accidents** (NESA, European Nights without accidents) is another European wide campaign now still being financed by the European Commission. It aims to make young drivers aware of the influence of alcohol (and drugs) on driving and to help them become responsible drivers.

The 2008 autumn and winter part of the **Czech Designated Driver** campaign DOMLUVME SE! (Let's agree!) started on October 20th with a concert of the popular Czech band CHINASKI in Jablonec nad Nisou. The campaign DOMLUVME SE! (Let's agree!) is a variation of the Designated Driver concept targeted at drinking and driving among young people. At special concerts the front men of bands send a clear message against drinking and driving to the visitors of their concerts and special promotional teams offer the chance to be voluntarily breathalysed. If a controlled person is clearly sober, they receive a small gift, e.g. a T-Shirt. The campaign is one of the main activities of the Czech Ministry of Transport, Road Safety Department (BESIP) and is supported by FORUM PSR (Responsible Spirits Producers) and the Responsible Brewers Initiative.

In **Ireland** the Road Safety Authority launched a new campaign in the summer of 2008 called 'He Drives, She Dies', aimed at young women, designed to empower them to say no to getting into a car with a man who drives dangerously. Research carried out found that more than half interviewed said they would accept a lift from someone who had been drinking. Two thirds of women passengers killed in car crashes are travelling in vehicles driven by men.

**Belgium** is home to the BOB campaign advocating safe, responsible and alcohol-free driving. The campaign was started in 1995. Fifteen EU Member States have used the concept and adapted it to their specific situation. BOB is the name of a person who does not drink when (s)he has to drive and who brings his/her friends home safely. The aim of the campaign is to convince people not to drink and drive. It strives to make drink driving socially unacceptable. An important element of the campaign is the support of the alcohol industry. The BOB campaign is always combined with more extensive enforcement during the campaign period. The campaign has both permanent elements such as the website and periodic elements such as bill board and TV ads,

The **Clean Parties Project** is supported by the European Commission and consists of organising 10 events without any alcohol or drugs in four European countries. It started in November 2007 in France (Lille and Paris) and Belgium (Brussels) and will continue through until 2009 extending to Luxembourg and the Netherlands. The project was initially founded by Voiture & Co and is now organised with the support of the Responsible Young Drivers. The parties took place on the same night in Brussels, Lille and Paris. The events were a great success with 450 participants per city. The aim of the parties is to communicate the strong message that it is possible to party without alcohol.

The **UK's** annual drink drive campaign in 2007 including an eye-catching image of a young man trapped inside a giant pint glass toured the UK in the run up to Christmas to raise awareness of the consequences of a drink drive conviction. The giant glass was taken to key city-centre locations and leaflets were handed out to the public. The message of the event, which was lead by the Government's Think! Campaign, was 'Don't let a drink drive conviction come between you and Christmas'. The campaign was launched by 20 year old Luke Noon, who lost his license, job and girlfriend after his drink drive conviction in 2006.

### References:

- Boots K, Midford R (1999): "Pick-a-Skipper": an evaluation of a designated driver program to prevent alcohol-related injury in a regional Australian city. *Health Promot Int* 1999; 14: 337–45.
- Ditter SM; Elder RW; Shults RA; Sleet DA; Compton R; Nichols JL (2005). Effectiveness of designated driver programs for reducing alcohol-impaired driving a systematic review Am J
- ERSO 2006: Novice Drivers. Retrieved January, 20, 2008. [www.erso.eu](http://www.erso.eu).
- Hingson R, Heeren T, Winter M. (1994): Lower legal blood alcohol limits for young drivers. *Public Health Reports* 109:738–744.
- OECD/ECMT 2006: Young Drivers. The Road to Safety. Paris, France
- NIAAA (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism) 1996: Alcohol Alert: Drinking and Driving. No. 31 PH. Retrieved at <http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/aa31.htm>
- SARTRE (Social Attitudes to Road Traffic Risks in Europe) 2004: European drivers and road risk – SARTRE 3. Arcueil, France.
- Shults R.A., Elder R.W., Sleet D.A., Nicholas J.L., Alao M.O., Carande-Kulis V.G., Zaza S., Sosin D.M., Thompson R.S., and the Task Force on Community Preventive Services (2001): Reviews of evidence regarding interventions to reduce alcohol-impaired driving. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 21, 66-88.
- SWOV (Stichting Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek Verkeersveiligheid) 2007a: Fact Sheet "Young novice drivers". Leidenscham, The Netherlands.