

**Report on the ETSC / Association Prévention Routière “Safe & Sober” Talk  
on “Reducing deaths and injuries from drink driving”  
Paris 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 2008**

**Executive Summary**

A “Safe & Sober” Talk on reducing deaths and injuries from drink driving, organised by ETSC and Association Prévention Routière was held last 2<sup>nd</sup> December at the Maison de l’Assurance in Paris.

In 2007 ETSC started a new campaign on drink driving, called “Safe & Sober”. In light of the European Union’s road safety target to halve road deaths by 2010, the objective of this activity is to raise awareness amongst policy makers, the private sector as well as key opinion leaders for a systemic approach to reduce alcohol misuse in road transport, especially in commercial road transport.

In the framework of this campaign, ETSC is organising a series of roundtable events (the “Safe & Sober Talks”) in selected member states bringing together drink driving stakeholders and road safety experts.

The central topic of this talk was how to tackle drink driving in France and how to profit from the experiences already implemented in other countries, particularly in the European Union.

The debate was chaired by Mr. Bernard Pottier, President of the Association Prévention Routière, who introduced the presentations of Mr. Lennart Pilskog from Volvo Trucks, Ms. Ellen Townsend from ETSC and Mr. Charles Mercier-Guyon, medical adviser at the Association Prévention Routière.

In these three presentations, the importance of drink driving as a crucial factor affecting road safety was thoroughly stressed. Statistical evidence showed that drink driving should be a serious concern both at French and European levels.

Some strategies implemented in countries like Finland or Sweden were considered as good practices and suggestions were made to adapt and introduce them in France as well as in the other EU Member States.

The introduction of alcohol interlocks for commercial fleet and driving school’s vehicles as well as for recidivist drink drivers was also discussed in depth during this talk. Some of the main advantages and disadvantages of this technology were further analysed.

Finally, the audience debated questions on important concerns related to drink driving, such as the social perception on alcohol consumption, the responsibility of haulage companies to manage the use of alcohol amongst their drivers and the necessity of better enforcement against drink driving offenders.

Experts from different Member States provided the audience with an insight into the drink driving problem in France and the European Union.

### **Experts' presentations**

#### ***Keynote: Lennart Pilskog (Director Public Affairs, Volvo Truck Corporation)***

Mr. Lennart Pilskog presented the drink driving problem as one of the most important factors affecting road safety and introduced Volvo Truck's expertise in implementing alcohol interlocks as an effective measure to face the problem of drink driving in commercial transport.

#### **Drink driving as one of the main factors affecting road safety**

Road deaths in Europe have been steadily decreasing for the last 15 years, in spite of the fact that traffic has been steadily increasing. In 2001 nearly 50,000 were killed in road traffic accidents, and in 2007 the number was over 42,000 (EU 27). Nevertheless, 42.000 deaths is still an alarmingly high number and the EU-27 is still far away from the objective of halving the number of deaths in 2010.

In order to further increase the level of road safety in EU roads, the main causes of road crashes would need to be analysed.

Statistics show that a very high percentage of accidents have driver related causes (90%); exclusively, or in combination with other circumstances (road environment and vehicle-related). Therefore, to address the problem of accidents, we must clearly look at the driver.

Responsible driving is an important key to safer traffic. The main factors that affect traffic safety are to rest before driving, not to use alcohol (or other drugs) in combination with driving, to follow the speed limits and to use the seat belt.

Among these factors, alcohol related deaths account for between 1/3 and ¼ of all road deaths in the EU (around 10,000 deaths a year). Commercial transport involving trucks is not overrepresented in these figures but very often the consequences of an accident involving at least one truck are more severe.

#### **Countermeasures to face drink driving in commercial transport**

The haulage companies should take responsibility for the safety of their own staff and should develop a corporate strategy against drink driving. That strategy should necessarily include increasing the knowledge of their staff on the matter.

Other measures can be adopted according to each company's needs. The use of alcohol-testing equipment located by the gate or by the key locker at their premises could be effective for many companies. Nevertheless, the most efficient method of all would be to have an alcohol ignition interlock in every vehicle, making it virtually impossible to start out under the influence of alcohol.

Additionally, exhaustive enforcement carried out by public authorities would be an extraordinary measure to complement haulage's companies strategies against drink driving.

### **The use of alcohol interlocks in commercial transport**

An alcohol ignition interlock is a breath alcohol tester that has been integrated into the electrical and control systems of a vehicle. The purpose of the alcohol interlock is to prevent a driver with a BAC that exceeds the preset level from starting the vehicle or to prevent a drunk driver from operating the vehicle. The vehicle can only be started after passing an alcohol test.

One of the main advantages of alcohol interlocks is that they are easy to use. In the case of Volvo *alcolock* systems the driver just needs to blow for five seconds and start the vehicle. No retest is required unless the truck is stopped for more than 30 minutes.

The memory registering all the tests can be downloaded at a regular service. The information is encrypted and can only be read by the owner. Additionally, larger companies can have the units reprogrammed for their own special needs.

To reach maximum effectiveness of the alcohol interlock, the staff should be properly informed and involved in the process. They would need to understand why the *alcolocks* are installed and what will happen if someone tests positive. As part of a complete drink driving strategy, *alcolocks* tend to increase the general awareness of traffic safety, which will reduce the number of accidents, related to alcohol or not.

The haulage company should also develop a strategy to handle the situation of a positive test before the system is put into use. A well-accepted support system for regular offenders and the policy of rewarding (not punishing) honesty will greatly increase the probability for good results.

### **Future trends**

The demand of alcohol interlocks is increasing and that trend is expected to continue in the close future.

The testing equipment will be technically improved; they will become more advanced and even simpler to use.

Additionally, there is also an increasing interest in apparatus that can detect other drugs besides alcohol.

Finally an harmonisation of technical standards and legislation is expected and desirable.

### ***Drink driving in the EU: Ellen Townsend, (ETSC)***

The EU-27 is still far away from the objective of halving the number of deaths in 2010. Only three countries (France, Portugal and Luxembourg) are in good position to reach the 50% target in 2010. ETSC forecasts consider that the EU27 will only be able to reach this target in 2018, with many Member States, particularly in Eastern Europe not reaching it before 2020.

Drink driving is the second biggest killer after speeding on European roads (25%). In terms of driver deaths, drink driving even accounts for 30-40% of deaths. Additionally, in the EU as a whole, 1-

2% of all journeys are associated with an illegal Blood Alcohol Content. Nevertheless, these figures vary greatly across Europe. In some good performing countries like Finland this percentage drops to only 0.15%.

### **Difficult comparison among Member States**

Comparing the number of alcohol-related road deaths in the different Member States is not an easy task because each country has its own way of identifying deaths from drink driving accidents. Additionally, some countries do not test alcohol content among drivers killed on the spot and some others present deficiencies in the way drink driving is enforced.

Nevertheless, ETSC has recently tried to identify trends for 18 countries in order to reflect the progress on reducing drink driving related deaths.

Considering as an indicator the progress in reducing drink driving deaths compared with progress in reducing other road deaths, statistics show that the Czech Republic (11.3%), Belgium (9.4%) and Germany (6.2%) progress on reducing drink driving deaths has contributed most to overall reductions in road deaths over the last decade. On the contrary, in another group of countries changes in drink driving deaths have not contributed their share to overall reductions in road deaths. This group includes Sweden, Spain, Hungary and some other countries (Slovenia, Finland, Great Britain, Estonia, Denmark, Switzerland and Lithuania).

If the indicator used is the changes in deaths related to drink driving as such, the EU best performers would be the Czech Republic, Germany and the Netherlands where the number of drink driving related deaths has decreased since the mid-1990ies by more than 50%. In Hungary, Lithuania, Finland, Spain and the UK on the other hand, the drink driving problem actually worsened.

### **EU legislation on drink driving**

The BAC limits vary greatly across the EU, starting with 0.0 in Czech Republic, and ending at 0.8 in the UK.

In terms of EU legislation, there is currently only a legally non binding recommendation in force, which was adopted in 2001. It recommends a 0.5 BAC limit for all drivers and 0.2 BAC limit for commercial drivers. Apart from the BAC level chosen, it is crucial that the limit is properly enforced. Even a 0.0 limit does not work if drivers know that nobody will check them.

The European Commission adopted a recommendation (non binding legislation) on Traffic Law Enforcement in 2003, which addressed three main areas: speeding, drink driving and seat belt use.

This recommendation suggests that random breath testing should be applied and evidential breath testing devices should be used. In spite of this recommendation, the level of drink driving checks varies greatly across Europe: the highest levels of checks are found in Finland, where almost 40% of drivers are tested, Estonia, Sweden and the Netherlands. In all these countries police have been empowered to stop and breath test drivers at random.

On the other hand in countries like Italy, UK, and Belgium only few drivers are tested annually.

Evidence from different case studies shows that when countries intensify drink driving enforcement the number of alcohol related road deaths is reduced. That is the case for Austria and Switzerland. Additionally, the use of alcohol interlocks has proven to be successful in Finland, Sweden and France. In these countries the acceptance of *alcolocks* by society has been considerably high.

Finally, the EU should try to implement new measures to further deal with the problem of drink driving:

-A common BAC limit of max. 0.5 for all drivers and 0.2 for professional drivers and young drivers .

-Transposing the current recommendation on enforcement into a legally binding directive that includes minimal requirements for random breath testing.

-Promoting alcohol interlocks for commercial transport and recidivist offenders and setting up best practice guidelines in this field.

***Drink driving in France, Charles Mercier-Guyon (Medical Adviser, Association Prévention Routière)***

France has reduced considerably the number of road deaths in the last years mainly through better enforcement of speed limits. On the contrary, the problem of drink driving has not been dealt with to the same extent and the number of alcohol-related accidents has increased by 16.7%. Drink driving in France is the first offence considering the number of offences committed.

Nevertheless, when facing the problem of drink driving two groups of offenders would need to be considered. On the one hand, the *occasional drinkers* with habits of alcohol consumption linked to celebrations. On the other hand, a group of *hard core drinkers* that presents excessive alcohol consumption regularly.

**Penalties related to drink driving and alcohol interlocks**

The BAC limit in France is 0.5 g/l. Offenders with a BAC between 0.5 and 0.8 will face an economic fine and will lose 6 points in their driving licenses. As for offenders over 0.8 g/l they can be fined up to 4,500 €, can be imprisoned maximum 2 years, can have their licenses suspended up to 3 years and will lose 6 points on their driving licenses.

Offenders can also follow a drink driving program that can include the installation of an alcohol interlock in their cars.

The new legislative proposal presented to the French Parliament in autumn 2008 aims to introduce two new complementary penalties: the confiscation of the vehicle and the obligation to follow an alcohol interlock program up to 5 years.

With this piece of legislation France is trying to follow Swedish and Finnish experiences in introducing *alcolocks* as part of their rehabilitation programs. In the last 5 years both Sweden and Finland have been implementing *alcolock programs* but always on a voluntary basis. The United States have also gained great experience in the introduction of alcohol interlocks to face recidivism among drink drivers.

The use of alcohol interlocks presents certain advantages both for the offender and for society as a whole. First of all, it makes more difficult for the user to drive under the influence of alcohol and the rate of recidivism goes down between 60 and 70%. Additionally, the interlocks can help the driver to improve their social and professional insertion and finally can be an extraordinary complement to accompany rehabilitation programs focused on the change of behaviour of the driver towards alcohol.

### **Future trends in drink driving rehabilitation programs**

Alcohol interlocks should be perceived not as a punishment but as a primary and secondary preventive tool aimed at preventing the dangerous driver from driving. They always should be promoted as part of a rehabilitation program.

### **Debate**

The experts' presentations were followed by an open debate among all the participants. A wide range of stakeholders were represented at the round table (car manufacturers, road safety equipment producers, haulage and insurance companies, police officers, victims associations and other road safety NGO's, road safety researchers, representatives of the medical community). The audience diversity reinforced the quality of the debate by introducing different approaches and specific concerns on the drink driving topic.

The main concern for the road victims associations is to guarantee that legislation against drink driving is effectively enforced and that crimes committed as a result of driving under the influence of alcohol are heavily punished.

On the other hand, the perspective of road safety researchers was slightly different. Although, enforcement of legislation is absolutely crucial to face the problem of drink driving, the main challenge is to change the behaviour of the society towards alcohol. According to them, the awareness on the problems caused by alcohol consumption should start at an early stage (childhood), playing the family an essential role to succeed.

Medical community agreed with this second perspective, insisting that the problem of drink driving should be approached in a health basis rather than punitive.

Jean Paccal Assailly, a researcher from INRETS also supported this and stressed the need also for a reform of the driving licence training session to include training and awareness raising on the dangers of drink and drug driving. He also stressed the need to focus on targeting the most serious drinkers. One first step could be to introduce alcolocks in Driving Schools. Also one should consider the introduction of alcolocks in rehabilitation courses also for first time offenders. This proposal was also supported by one of the speakers Charles Mercier Guyon.

A representative from the Paris Police, Mr. Ribaucourt welcomed the new ban of the sale of alcohol at petrol stations. Also the increase of PTWs in Paris and the incidences of drink driving. He stressed the need to harmonise breath testing equipment in the EU. Moreover that the judiciary should apply a stronger role in sanctioning more strictly in the case of drink driving.

A representative from a haulage company FNTR Mr. Legrand from Brittany expressed the importance of their own commitment to deal with all road safety problems, particularly drink driving. A responsible company should ensure high standards of road safety for their own staff as well as for their customers. The representative shared their experience of introducing alcolocks to their fleet following an incidence of drink driving.

Mr. Pierre Gustin of Prevention Routiere also asked about the level of involvement of alcohol producers particularly in targeting young people by sponsoring student parties.

Finally, a specific debated was raised on the effectiveness of introducing alcohol interlocks in all vehicles. Some problems such as the necessity of harmonising the authorising process at international level were identified.

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