

# Drink Driving Monitor

ETSC's Newsletter on Drink Driving Policy Developments in the EU

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## Editorial

### Drink driving – progress in some countries, but others too slow

While the dangers linked to drink driving are fairly well understood, this phenomenon is still widespread in Europe. A recently published ETSC Report ([http://www.etsc.be/documents/PIN\\_Report.pdf](http://www.etsc.be/documents/PIN_Report.pdf)) provided an overview of European countries' performance in five areas of road safety, including drink driving.

Levels of deaths related to drink driving could not be compared between countries, as there are large differences in the way in which countries define and record a 'crash related to drink driving'. Countries were therefore compared on the basis of developments in deaths from drink driving crashes, relative to developments in other road deaths.

The ranking covered 20 European countries. In half of these countries, progress on drink driving contributed more than its share to overall reductions in deaths over the last decade. This is especially true for the Czech Republic, Belgium, Germany and Poland. In the Czech Republic, road deaths from drink driving crashes dropped 11.3% faster than deaths from other crashes. For Belgium, this figure is 9.4%, for Germany 6.2% and for Poland 5.6%.

In the other half of countries, changes in drink driving deaths have not contributed their share to overall reductions in traffic deaths. This group includes Sweden, Spain, Hungary, Slovenia, Finland, Great Britain and Estonia. In these countries, developments in drink driving deaths have rather slowed down overall progress in reducing road deaths.

Against this background, the European Transport Safety Council welcomes the recently launched EU Alcohol and Health Forum. By founding the Forum, more than 40 non-governmental and businesses organisations agreed to take action to protect European citizens from the harmful use of alcohol. ETSC is a founding member of the Forum and will contribute with its drink driving activities to the important task of reducing alcohol-related deaths on the European roads.

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## Country News

### Germany: Zero BAC limit for novice drivers has been adopted

The law proposal for a zero BAC limit for young drivers has been approved by the German Federal Council on 6 July and will come into force by 1 August 2007. The new law ensures that in future all drivers under the age of 21 caught with even the smallest amounts of alcohol in their blood will face a fine of 125 Euros and will get penalty points. In addition, their probation period will be extended by 4 years.

The law proposal was tightened by the Parliament in the end of May. Originally, it was only planned to cover novice drivers being in their licence probation period of 2 years. According to the Parliament as well as the Federal Council the original proposal could have left loopholes. For example, there would have been the opportunity for young drivers to getting a special moped licence at the age of 16. By this, these drivers would have automatically finished their probation period of 2 years when getting their normal driving licence at the age of 18. These drivers wouldn't have been affected by the originally planned law.

### Positive effects of alcolock programme in Sweden

A study conducted in Sweden has evaluated health outcomes following an alcolock programme by assessing hospital care utilization and sick-leave register data relative to controls with revoked licences, but with no comparable opportunity to participate in an interlock programme.

In Sweden, drink driving offenders can select voluntarily a 2-year interlock programme in lieu of 12 months' licence revocation. The interlock programme includes regular medical check-ups designed to alter alcohol use. The control group (865 people) showed increased hospital care and sick leave after licence revocation following the drink driving offence. Among the 1,266 people in the interlock programme, however, significantly fewer needed hospi-

tal care relative to controls, and relative to their own care utilization before the drink driving offence.

This occurred whether care reflected all diagnosis or only alcohol-related diagnosis. Also, sick-leave data showed significantly fewer individuals in the interlock programme using sick leave relative to the control group, and relative to their own pre-treatment period. These significant health benefits disappear in the post-treatment period. However, among those who actually do complete the entire interlock programme, sustained positive health effects are observed 3 and 4 years after the drink driving offence. The study concludes that voluntary participation in an interlock programme has favourable effects with less need for hospital care or sick leave. This is probably linked to reduced alcohol consumption during the programme and to the ability to continue driving.

### Alcohol misuse and traffic accidents examined in Italy

An Italian study about alcohol misuse and traffic accidents has shown that out of 2354 patients admitted to an Italian emergency department for an injury caused by a traffic accident 25.7% of them were above the legal BAC limit of 0.5 mg/ml. Also, the proportion of patients over the limit increased progressively with trauma severity, and almost 30% of patients with multiple trauma were over the limit.

### UK: Drink driving death toll of young motorists on the rise

Figures from the UK show that the number of young motorists involved in accidents while under the influence of alcohol is increasing. According to the Department of Transport there were 2280 20 to 25-year-olds involved in drink driving accidents in 2005 (latest figures), compared to 2170 in 1995. Moreover, figures from the BBC reveal that young adults between the age of 17 and 24 make up a disproportionately high amount of offenders and casualties in drink driving accidents.

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) announced that these news about young drink-drivers underlined the urgent need for a reduction in the BAC limit and for police to be given powers to breath test drivers at random. According to the RoSPA, a cut in the BAC limit from 0.8 mg/ml to 0.5 mg/ml would save 65 lives and 230 serious injured on Britain's roads each year.

### **Ireland: Mandatory Alcohol Testing Producing Reduction in Road Deaths**

Figures released in the beginning of June 2007 by the Road Safety Authority (RSA) indicate that the number of people being killed on Irish roads has dropped by almost a quarter (23%) since the introduction of Mandatory Alcohol Testing in July 2006. They show that there have been 80 fewer deaths recorded in the eleven month period since the introduction of Mandatory Alcohol Testing compared to the previous eleven month period.

"Over the last eleven months there have been 274 deaths on our roads while the previous eleven months saw 354 deaths," explained Noel Brett from RSA. "It is clear that Mandatory Alcohol Testing has contributed significantly to the number of lives saved – along with high profile awareness campaigns and a greater police presence on the roads."

"It is also important to remember that driver alcohol is a male problem with 89.7% of driver or riders, whose alcohol was a contributory factor in a fatal crash, were male," stated Brett.

### **Netherlands: New project on alcohol and drugs in traffic by SWOV**

In the Netherlands, the Dutch Institute for Road Safety Research SWOV has launched a European study on the use of alcohol, drugs and medicines in traffic. In the so called DRUID (Driving Under the Influence of Drugs, alcohol, and medicines) project, motorists who are breathalysed in a regular alcohol check are also tested on the use of drugs or medicines on a voluntary basis. Drivers who are stopped in a road block

by the police will be asked by SWOV researchers to participate in this project. Police and SWOV emphasize that participation in this study is voluntary and completely anonymous.

The aim of this study is to get a representative picture of the use of alcohol, drugs, and medicine in Dutch traffic. The study also intends to determine how dangerous it is to drive under the influence of these substances. This will be done by comparing the drugs and medicine use of injured motorists with that of uninjured motorists in the roadside study. The study will be carried out the six regions: those of the cities and towns of Amsterdam, Enschede, Groningen, Leiden, Nijmegen, and Tilburg. The measurements will continue up to July 2009. More information on the DRUID project can be found under [www.druid-project.com](http://www.druid-project.com).

### **Switzerland: Less alcohol-related road deaths, but more injuries**

The introduction of a 0.5 BAC limit in conjunction with random breath testing in 2005 in Switzerland has a positive impact on the number of alcohol-related road deaths. This numbers were reduced by 25% between 2005 and 2006 and by further 19% between 2006 and 2007. A negative aspect is the increase in alcohol-related road injuries of 9% between 2005 and 2006.

According to the Swiss Council for Accident Prevention ([www.bfu.ch](http://www.bfu.ch)) the reduction of alcohol-related road deaths is the result of the new legislative measures. Random breath testing has led to an increase in alcohol checks. In 2005, 50% of all drivers stopped were checked for alcohol, compared to 30% in 2003 before the introduction. Moreover, the new BAC limit and the random tests are widely accepted among drivers. In 2006, 85% of drivers supported the 0.5 BAC limit (65% 2001) and 77% were in favour with random breath tests (65% 2001).

## Country Focus: Ireland

### Mandatory Alcohol Testing is leading to reduction in road deaths numbers

In the past two years road safety was a highly visible topic on the political agenda in Ireland. This is due to the fact that the country was able to decrease the number of deaths in the 1990's but was facing an increase from 335 (2003) to 399 (2005). The preliminary number for 2006 is 327. This decrease is probably based on better enforcement and more drink driving checks due the introduction of mandatory alcohol testing in July 2006.

Drink driving checks are undertaken by the police (Garda National Traffic Bureau) and carried out by operational Traffic Units based in each Garda Division in each region. In November 2004 the Department of Transport and the Ministry of Justice announced the creation of a new Traffic Corps to replace the former Traffic Unit. A total of 700 new officers would be recruited to join the current 500 officers who are part of the Traffic Unit bringing the total up to approximately 1,200 by 2008. Enforcement planning is carried out by annual plans of the Garda and mid term programmes like the Garda Síochána Corporate Strategy 2005-2007.

In terms of drink driving, the legal blood alcohol level of 0.8 per mill remains with the one in the UK the highest within the EU. The sanctions for drink driving are tough as they carry mandatory disqualifications from driving. But the problem is that Ireland had up to July 2006 one of the lowest numbers of drink driving checks within the EU. If drivers know that there is hardly any likelihood of being caught the toughest sanctions make no sense. Since July 2006, mandatory breath tests were introduced to cut the increasing number of fatalities. Until then the police could only request a preliminary roadside breath test from a driver if they had the suspicion that he/she had committed a road traffic offence or had been involved in a collision.

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In the past, drink driving has been one of the key reasons for road accidents. Studies indicate that alcohol was a factor in 37% of fatal collisions in 2003. It was also found that in 62% of single-vehicle, single-occupant fatal collisions, alcohol was a factor. Driver/rider alcohol was a factor in 28% of fatal crashes, while pedestrian alcohol was a factor in 38% of fatal pedestrian road crashes.

## ETSC News

### ETSC signed Charter of European Alcohol and Health Forum

ETSC signed on 7 June the Charter establishing the Alcohol and Health Forum in order to take action to protect EU citizens from the harmful use of alcohol. Several non-governmental organisations and businesses, responding to a European Commission initiative, agreed that day to take action to protect European citizens from the harmful use of alcohol. The Alcohol and Health Forum, scheduled to meet twice a year, is to focus especially on concrete actions to protect young people and children and to prevent irresponsible commercial alcohol communication and sales. The move comes at a time when an estimated 200,000 Europeans die every year because of harmful alcohol use and approximately 10,000 EU citizens die in alcohol-related road accidents annually.

The European Alcohol and Health Forum is a common platform for action. Its members are economic operators and NGO's that are willing to devote time and resources to adopt meaningful actions to prevent alcohol-related harm. EU member states, European Institutions, the World Health Organisation and the International Organisation of Vine and Wine participate as observers.



### First Safe & Sober Talk held in Helsinki

Twenty road safety experts gathered on June 13 in Helsinki to discuss strategies to reduce alcohol misuse in road transport at the first "Safe and Sober" Talk held in Finland. The event was co-organised by ETSC and the Finnish Traffic Safety Committee of Insurance Companies (VALT) in the framework of ETSC's "Safe & Sober" drink driving programme.

The debate showed that, in overall terms, Finland shows one of the best non-drink-driving performances compared to other EU states. In 2006, only 0.15% of drivers were driving under the influence of alcohol (i.e. with an illegal Blood Alcohol Content (BAC)), compared to an estimated 2% in the EU. Approximately 50% of drivers are breath tested on alcohol annually, which is one of the highest numbers in Europe. Nonetheless alcohol is a factor in approximately 25% of all fatal motor vehicle accidents, according to VALT.

Although being one of Europe's frontrunners in terms of road safety, Finland could do more to prevent alcohol related accidents. "The situation won't change without intensified enforcement and tougher legislation. Equipping cars with alcohol interlocks and adopting a lower BAC limit could form part of the solution", Esa Rätty, Road Safety Researcher at VALT pointed out.

The objective of the Talk and the "Safe & Sober" campaign is to raise awareness amongst policy makers, the private sector as well as some key opinion leaders for a systematic approach to reduce drink driving, especially in commercial transport. The campaign will identify and promote Best Practice from the health and transport sectors alike. It will include measures relating to education (e.g. effective information campaigns), enforcement (e.g. random breath testing) and engineering (e.g. alcohol interlocks).



**European Transport Safety Council**

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