

# Drink Driving Monitor

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

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## Editorial

Drink driving is the second greatest cause of road deaths in the EU after speeding. In the EU as a whole, around 1% of journeys are associated with an illegal BAC, resulting in 30-40% of driver deaths. Young people aged 18 to 24 are particularly at risk.

The effects of alcohol on driving performance range from anaesthesia after large amounts of alcohol to impairment of behavioural and cognitive capabilities after small doses. Alcohol may also decrease motivation to comply with safety standards, which may result in an active search for dangerous situations (such as competitive behaviour, or excessive speed). In general, all functions which are important in the safe operation of a motor vehicle can be affected by alcohol abuse.

In a report produced in response to the Commission's Mid-term Review of the European Road Safety Action Programme, the European Parliament has called on Member States to tackle drink-driving more effectively. The European Commission has also recently developed a Strategy to support Member States in reducing alcohol related harm. Combating drink driving injuries and deaths features prominently in this strategy.

Against this background, the European Transport Safety Council has set up two projects with the aim of contributing to the reduction of alcohol-related road deaths and injuries. One programme, co-funded by DIAGEO, will focus on strategies to address the issue of high-BAC recidivist drunk drivers and young and novice drivers as both groups are more involved in alcohol-related road accidents. Another programme, Safe & Sober, will raise awareness amongst policy makers, the private sector as well as some key opinion leaders for a systemic approach to reduce alcohol misuse in road transport. Safe & Sober is funded by the Volvo Group.

With this quarterly newsletter, ETSC wants to keep the road safety community informed about the latest road safety developments in fighting drink-driving. Each edition will focus on a particular country and on progress made in different Member States. Our Monitor will, of course, also give you a regular update on ETSC's own activities in this respect.

After having introduced ETSC's new programmes, the current issue gives an overview of the latest developments in alcohol related road safety policies in the EU with a particular focus on Finland.

Jörg Beckmann  
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# ETSC's drink driving programmes

## The drink driving policy network on young drivers and recidivist offenders

The objective of this new programme at ETSC is to contribute to reducing alcohol-related road deaths and injuries through the identification and promotion of best practice. The programme will focus on strategies to address the issue of high-BAC recidivist drunk drivers and young and novice drivers as both are more involved in alcohol-related road accidents. The Programme will benefit from the work ETSC has carried out in relation to traffic law enforcement, monitoring the performance of EU Member States in ensuring compliance with existing traffic rules and regulations, particularly on matters concerning alcohol and driving. The focus of the Programme is aligned with the EU Alcohol Strategy to reduce injuries and deaths from alcohol-related road traffic accidents. The Drink Driving Policy Network will be committed to ETSC's systemic and science-based approach to road safety work. Apart from regularly monitoring alcohol related road safety policy with the Drink Driving Monitor, the programme's deliverables also include a Policy Paper, a series of Fact Sheets and two advocacy events (European Transport Safety Lunches). The overall objective of the Programme is to reduce drink-driving deaths and injuries by providing science-based advice and recommendations to EU and national policy makers.

## "Safe & Sober": Combatting drink driving in commercial transport

The objective of this activity is to raise awareness amongst policy makers, the private sector as well as some key opinion leaders for a systemic approach to reduce alcohol misuse in road transport, especially in the less well-performing EU member states. Over a period of three years ETSC will work towards improving local, regional and national policies for the prevention of drink driving in Europe. The campaign will identify and promote Best Practice from the health and the transport sector alike. It will address measures relating to education (e.g. effective information campaigns), enforcement (e.g. random breath testing) and engineering (e.g. alcohol interlocks). The "Safe & Sober" Campaign receives financial support from the Volvo Group.

## Country News

### Zero BAC limit for novice drivers in Germany

Germany plans the introduction of a zero BAC limit for novice drivers to crack down on drink driving among young drivers, currently accounting for more than 30% of alcohol-related accidents. In February 2007, the federal cabinet adopted a government's draft bill on a zero tolerance policy regarding alcohol for all drivers who have had a license for less than two years.

In future, offenders caught with even the smallest traces of alcohol in their blood will face a fine of 125 Euros and have their names registered in an index of traffic offenders. In addition, they will have their li-

cense probation period extended by 4 years and will have to complete a course on behaviour in traffic at a cost of up to 450 Euros.

### Proposal to cut BAC limit for novice drivers in Belgium

On the occasion of the 2nd "États Généraux" of Road Safety held in Belgium on March 12th 2007 to discuss a new action plan designed to reduce the number of road deaths to 500 by 2015, the Belgian Federal Commission for Road Safety has published a list of recommendations to reduce the number of road accidents on the country's roads.

One of the recommendations is to reduce the legal blood-alcohol limit from 0.5 to 0.2 mg/ml for drivers on a provisional licence. The Federal Commission has also called for more roadside breath tests.

### **Italian Minister of Transport announces tougher penalties for drink driving**

In a move to curb the recent increase of drink-driving deaths, involving especially young drivers, Italian Minister of Transport Alessandro Bianchi has announced stronger penalties for drivers taking the wheel after having drunk.

According to the Minister, recent data showed a loss of momentum in Italy's efforts to contribute to the EU target of halving road deaths by 2010. Road accidents in Italy are estimated to cost 30 billion Euros, 2.5% of GDP.

The proposed legislation would punish the most serious infringements to drink driving traffic law with a fine up to 12,000 Euros and with imprisonment up to 6 months.

### **Positive impact of screening testing in Austria**

In Austria, the introduction of new screening test devices contributed to more road safety. One year after the introduction of the first 200 devices in December 2005, the Austrian Minister of Transport Hubert Gorbach looked back on a positive performance in terms of road safety. Austria achieved a 7.5% reduction in alcohol-related accidents and a 20% reduction in alcohol-related deaths in 2006 compared to 2005, he emphasised.

The new breath testers helped the Austrian police to cope with large numbers of offences: the new roadside breath testers allowed the police to test ten times more drivers than before.

### **New BAC limit for novice drivers in the Netherlands**

The Netherlands have introduced a new BAC limit of 0.2 mg/ml for novice drivers in 2006. This new limit applies for the first five years after obtaining a driving licence to drivers who obtained their novice driving licence on or after 30 March 2002. The Dutch Institute for Road Safety (SWOV) estimates that such a lowering of the limit for novice drivers could result in a 5% reduction of the total of alcohol crashes in the Netherlands. This means an annual saving of about 12 deaths and approximately 100 in-patients.

### **Random breath tests for drivers in the UK?**

Drivers could face random breath tests under government plans to combat drink driving in the UK. A Department for Transport road safety review said tougher enforcement was the best way of tackling the problem. The report said it would consult on the move during 2007 and also examine the level of the blood-alcohol limit. Minister of Transport Stephen Ladyman said he had an open mind about introducing random breath tests. "If it helps us to improve enforcement and to really crack down on drink-driving then maybe it is something we have got to do", he said. At present police can only impose breath tests on motorists they suspect are above the limit.

Figures in the UK show some worrying trends with 17% of road deaths taking place when the driver was over the limit. Despite a decline in drink-related deaths in 2005, there were still more that year than in 1998 and 1999.

### **More drink drivers involved in fatal crashes in Finland**

In Finland, according to preliminary data made available, drink drivers caused 86 fatal crashes in 2006. This represents one third of all fatal motor vehicle accidents occurred in Finland that year. The figure for 2005 was 69, which accounted for one quarter of all fatal crashes.

Last year's figure was sent high by young, under 25-year-old drivers. Finnish road accident investigation teams suspect that 32 accidents caused by under 25-year-olds involved a driver who was driving drunk. The number was almost double the number recorded for the year before. There was no change in suspected drink driving among drivers older than 25. Finnish road accident investigation teams investigated a total of 255 motor vehicle accidents which claimed 269 lives in 2006.

### Alcohol's role in fatal road crashes studied in Ireland

In Ireland, the first national study into the role of alcohol in fatal road crashes has been published in November 2006. It reveals that 90% of drivers whose alcohol intake was a factor in fatal crashes were male. In 37% of fatal crashes alcohol was a factor. 62% of single vehicle accidents had alcohol as a factor. It also revealed that weekends through to Monday morning is what is called 'the killing zone' for alcohol-related fatal crashes.

## Country Focus: Finland

### One of the best non-drink-driving performances in Europe

Road Safety is one of the most important topics on Finland's transport policy agenda. Over the past decades Finland has continually improved its road safety performance especially by adopting a Vision Zero policy. Vision Zero is an ethical approach to road safety which was introduced in Sweden in 1995. It is conceived from the idea that no one should be killed or injured for life in road traffic. Finland has also set an ambitious long-term target to minimise deaths to no more than 100 by 2025.

The country's measures to reach this target are predominantly linked to changing driver behaviour such as drink driving. By means of tough legislation, highly visible enforcement and innovative technologies the country has achieved an impressively low rate of only 0.15% of drivers driving under the influence of alcohol (i.e. BAC >0.05%) in 2005, which is one of the lowest rates in Europe (Figure 1). Even though this percentage of drunken drivers in Finland has gradually decreased in the past years, one in five road deaths is the result of an accident where an intoxicated driver is involved.

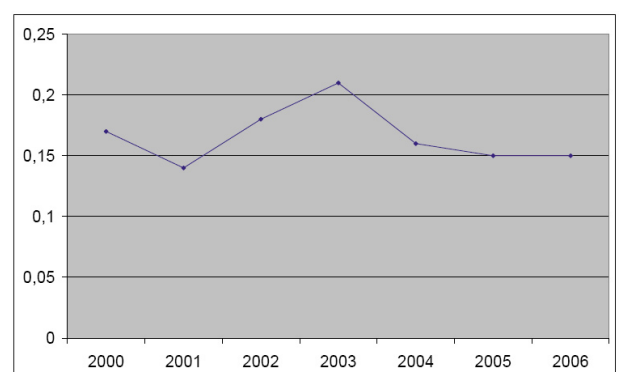
Approximately 1.4 million alcohol tests are undertaken annually, which means that 40% of the drivers are tested each year. This is combined with legislation that is meant to deter. Legislation defines exceeding the legal BAC level as a crime and penalises offenders with imprisonment of up to two years.

Moreover, in the homeland of mobile phones, electronic devices are also facilitating the fight against

drink driving. Finland is one of Europe's pioneers in supporting alcohol inter-locks ("alcolocks"). The aim is to have the alcolock as a compulsory device in all new heavy goods vehicle and buses/coaches by 2010 and in all new cars by 2012. This coincides with targets set in Sweden.

Moreover, Finland started several rehabilitation programmes for drink driving offenders. Drivers who have been caught drink driving are offered the possibility of taking part in the trial and then receive a temporary "alcolock driver's licence". The offenders also have to take part in regular tests for alcohol dependency during a one year period. Also the police monitors the driver's progress by downloading data from the alcolocks memory. Alcohol interlocks are also used on a voluntary basis by some transport and cab companies and a driving school in Finland. Despite a short-term increase in recent years, the longer term linear trend shows a continuous decrease of alcohol-related road deaths.

Figure 1: Drink driving as a proportion in traffic flow (in %)



Source: Liikenneturva 2006

## ETSC News

### Alcohol and Health Forum

On 24 October 2006 the European Commission adopted a Communication on an EU strategy to support Member States in reducing alcohol-related harm. One of the key instruments to implement the EU strategy will be a Forum on Alcohol and Health. ETSC attended the Stakeholder preparatory meeting in Brussels on 7 March 2007.

The overall objective of the Alcohol and Health Forum will be to provide a common platform for relevant stakeholders to step up their actions to reduce alcohol-related harm. Members of the Forum (NGOs as well as economic operators) will have to contribute to reducing alcohol harm in the EU through concrete and verifiable commitments that can be monitored in a transparent, participative and accountable way.

The Launch of the Forum is foreseen for Summer 2007.

### PIN ranking on drink driving

The ETSC's Road Safety Performance Index (PIN) is a new policy instrument to help EU Member States in improving road safety. By comparing Member States' performance, it helps to identify and promote Best Practice in Europe and to build political leadership in road safety.

Started in June 2006, the PIN covers all relevant areas of road safety including road user behaviour, infrastructure and vehicles, as well as road safety policy-making more generally.

National research organisations and independent researchers from 27 countries participating in the programme are ensuring that any assessment carried out within the programme is based on scientific evidence and is effectively communicated to European road safety policymakers.

The upcoming PIN ranking will look at progress made over the last decade in reducing deaths from crashes related to drink driving in each country. According to preliminary results, only about half of the 17 countries included in the ranking succeeded in reducing deaths from drink driving crashes faster or at the same pace as other deaths. In the other half of countries, changes in drink driving deaths have not contributed to overall reductions in traffic deaths, but rather slowed down overall progress.

The ranking will also shed light on the lack of reliable data in the area of drink driving. It will show that roughly 1 in 3 European countries do not have at their disposal the kind of data needed to judge whether progress has been made in this important area of road safety.

## ETSC Transport Safety Dinner on drink driving

In the framework of the European Road Safety Week, the European Transport Safety Council will organise a Transport Safety Dinner debate on **"Safe & Sober – Preventing drink driving in commercial transport"** on **Wednesday 25 April 2007 (19:00-21:15)** – an excellent occasion to discuss among transport safety experts the problem of drink driving in commercial transport.

ETSC's Transport Safety Dinners provide a platform for openly debating promising and successful European approaches to prevent both accidents and injuries in transportation. They bring together decision makers and distinguished scholars from the transport sector.

The participation is free of charge. For more information and registration, please visit the ETSC website.



**European Transport Safety Council**

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