

Setting limits. Saving Lives.



Setting limits. Saving Lives. BAC* .08 It's the law.

*Blood Alcohol Concentration

Effective

September 1, 2001, new legislation relating to Driving Under the Influence (DUI) went into effect in Alaska. The Statute [AS28.35.030(a)], has been amended to read in essence, 'A person commits the crime of driving under the influence if the person operates or drives a motorized vehicle while under the influence of intoxicating liquor, or any controlled substance; or when there is .08 or more blood alcohol concentration (BAC).'

A Case For .08 BAC

Recent studies in laboratories and on-road research show even experienced drinkers are significantly impaired at .08 with regard to critical driving tasks such as braking, steering, lane changing, judgment, complex reaction time, and divided attention. The studies indicate the majority of drivers (60-94%)

were impaired at .08 BAC in any one given measure, regardless of age, gender, or driving experience. Most states that have lowered their BAC to .08 have found a measurable drop in impaired driving fatalities.

The Government Accounting Office (GAO) reviewed countless studies available and reported there are strong indications that .08 BAC laws, in combination with other impaired driving laws, sustained public education and information efforts, and vigorous and consistent enforcement, can save lives. Independent review of the studies indicates .08 BAC laws consistently result in median (7%) decline in crash fatalities.

Impaired Driving Affects Us All

Two out of five Americans will be involved in an alcohol-related crash at some time in their lives. Many will be innocent victims. As BAC levels rise, so does the risk of being involved in a fatal crash. Research shows that, in single vehicle fatal crashes, the relative fatality risk for the drivers with BACs between .08 and .10 is at least eleven times greater than for a driver with a BAC of zero and is 52 times greater for young males.

Facts On Impaired Driving In Alaska

- In 2001*, traffic accidents injured or killed 6632 Alaskans causing \$55.9 million damage to vehicles plus \$3.3 million damage to highway structures.
- There were 1146 alcohol related accidents in 2001*. Thirty-six of those resulted in fatalities (45%)
- Forty-two people died in traffic accidents in which at least one driver or involved nonmotorist was reported to be alcohol impaired.
- Among drivers with BACs above .15 on weekend nights, the likelihood of death in a single-vehicle crash is more than 380 times higher than it is for non-drinking drivers.
- In 2001*, the alcohol related fatality rate was 47.2%.

Facts On Economic Issues

- Motor vehicle crashes cost society \$150 billion each year in emergency and acute health care costs, long-term care and rehabilitation, police and judicial services, property damage, insurance, disability and workers compensation, lost productivity, and social services for those who cannot return to work and support their families.
- Alcohol-related crashes cost society over \$45 billion every year. Just one alcohol-related fatality is estimated to cost society about \$950,000. Each alcohol-related injury averages about \$20,000.
- Almost a quarter of first-year medical costs for persons hospitalized as a result of a crash are paid by tax dollars, about two-thirds through Medicaid and one-third through Medicare.
- Employers pay approximately half the cost of motor vehicle crashes through insurance, disability, worker's compensation, and lost productivity.
- Crash costs are \$5.54 for every mile driven by alcohol-impaired drivers. This includes \$2.34 to people other than the alcohol-impaired driver. By comparison, crash costs are \$.10 per mile driven while sober.
- An alcohol-impaired driving crash costs each innocent victim \$36,000. Comparable crime costs per victim are: assault \$30,000; robbery \$16,000; motor vehicle theft \$4,000. Yet, the impaired driving crash is the only one of these crimes that is often not considered a felony upon the first offense.

*2001 most current data available.

Your Best Defense

These actions might help fight impaired drivers:

- Wear your safety belt and be sure your children are properly secured in child safety seats.
- Be a responsible host/hostess.
- Never ride in a car operated by someone who has been drinking.
- Support measures to strengthen the war against alcohol-impaired driving and victims' rights laws.
- Report alcohol-impaired drivers immediately.

Myths and Facts

Myth: "I know when I'm too drunk to drive."

Fact: Alcohol affects your ability to judge whether or not you are impaired. Alcohol also causes impairment in reaction time, attention, tracking, comprehension, and other skills essential for safe driving.

Myth: ".08 BAC legislation will not affect problem drinkers who have high BAC levels."

Fact: Research shows that .08 laws not only do reduce the incidence of impaired driving at lower BACs, they also reduce the incidence of impaired driving at BACs over .10. A .08 law serves as a general deterrent to drinking and driving, sends a message that the state is getting tougher on impaired driving, and makes people think twice about getting behind the wheel after they've had too much to drink. A .08 BAC law is a key part of a complete package to reduce impaired driving.

.08 Works

Several things happen as a result of .08 BAC laws:

It increases the arrests and convictions for impaired drivers; raises the perceived risk of arrest for driving after drinking; improves public awareness about how much alcohol it takes to be dangerously impaired; and brings the United States to closer limits of most industrialized nations. (The BAC level in Sweden, for example, is .02.)

.08 Could Save Your Life

If every state adopted a .08 law, hundreds of lives could be saved every year, with thousands of injuries prevented and millions of dollars saved. But even more important would be all the extra birthday candles that would get blown out, the graduation ceremonies that would be attended, the weddings that would be celebrated, and the millions of everyday smiles that would be exchanged.

No one will ever know if they or one of their loved ones will be the next victim of impaired driving, just as no one will ever know if they are the one who was spared thanks to good public policy. .08 is sensible, reasonable, and effective.

Tips For Social Drinking

Celebrations and special occasions usually mean consumption of alcoholic beverages. Don't overdo it! These tips and other reminders for social occasions can be found at www.roadsafety.net:

Tip 1: Do yourself a favor and plan ahead how many drinks you will have. Prove you can keep the promise to yourself by monitoring your drinking.

Tip 2: Finish each drink before you have another. Avoid top-ups as this makes it hard to keep track of standard drinks.

Tip 3: Only *time* can sober you up. Food, coffee, a cold shower, or fresh air will *not* sober you up. It takes an hour for the body to process one standard drink.

Tip 4: Eat before and while you drink to fill your stomach and reduce the number of drinks you have.

Avoid salty foods that only make you more thirsty.

Tip 5: If you intend to have a few drinks, plan how you are going to get home if you don't intend to stay the night.

Tip 6: Alternate alcoholic and non-or low alcoholic drinks. Tip 7: Never be in a hurry to get behind the wheel following a big night out. You could still be over the limit—and dangerous to yourself and others the morning after.