

Drunk Driving: Dangers, Deaths and DUIs

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The number of drunk driving fatalities in the U.S. has declined by over 50 percent since 1980. Yet in spite of the progress that has been made, drunk driving still accounts for nearly a THIRD of all accidents! What's more, impaired drivers killed nearly 11,000 people in the U.S. last year (one every 48 minutes!), and injured over 300,000!

Over 50 percent of all fatal accidents involving two or more vehicles are alcohol related. Over 65 percent of all single vehicle fatal accidents are alcohol related. Over 36 percent of all pedestrians hit by cars are alcohol related.

Drunk driving is a serious problem, one that hits close to home. One out of three people know someone who was killed by a drunk driver.

Some time ago, a friend of mine, his wife and two small children were on their way to a Good Friday church service. A drunk driver traveling at a high rate of speed lost control of his car, crossed the median on a divided four-lane highway just a few blocks from our house, and plowed into my friend's car head on. My friend's wife was killed instantly, their two small children in the backseat suffered numerous broken bones and injuries, and my friend had both of his legs shattered. The drunk driver suffered only minor injuries, as is often the case. One person's stupidity and poor judgment ended up destroying another person's life and family.

A close relative lost his grandfather and his father's brother to a drunk driver many years ago. Because of this, my son-in-law vowed he would never drink (and he hasn't). I'd say that's good advice for anyone who might have alcoholism or drug dependency issues in their family.

Another drunk driving accident just a couple of miles from our house ended the lives of a retired school administrator and his wife. They were on their way home from a dinner out when a drunk driver traveling over 100 mph blew a red light and t-boned their car. The couple was killed instantly, and again the person who caused it suffered only minor injuries.

Many people have a drunk driving story that is personal. And even when a story is not personal, it is often tragic and totally preventable.

DUI: DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF ALCOHOL OR DRUGS

One government statistic estimates that over 300,000 people are driving drunk every day in this country, yet only about 1 percent are ever caught. Getting a DUI is certainly a deterrent to driving drunk or impaired, but apparently it is not enough of a deterrent to prevent many people from getting behind the wheel after they had a few too many drinks. According to information published on the Mothers Against Drunk Driving website, one out of five drivers under the age of 21 have admitted to driving while intoxicated.

For every alcoholic drink, your Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) increases about 0.02 percent. A person's size and weight are also a factor, with smaller people reaching a higher BAC much faster than a larger person. So depending on the concentration of alcohol in what a person is drinking, it may only take three or four drinks to reach a BAC of 0.08, which is the legal limit in all 50 states.

A standard drink is defined as 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine or a 1.5oz. shot of 80 proof alcohol.

What's more, it takes time for the body to metabolize the alcohol out of your blood stream: figure about an hour for each drink consumed. So if somebody consumes six or seven drinks over a period of a couple of hours, it could take up to six hours or more for the effects to wear off. Binge drinking is even worse because it overloads the body with a lot of alcohol in a very short period of time. The faster the alcohol is ingested, the longer it takes the liver to get rid of it.

THE ROOT CAUSE OF DRUNK DRIVING

When people drink for whatever reason (to be sociable, to compliment a meal, to unwind after a long day, or to deal with emotional, psychological, financial or marital issues), it affects their coordination, reaction time, speech, balance, vision and logical reasoning. And it doesn't take that much alcohol to have a noticeable effect on many people.

Alcohol loosens up social inhibitions, and undermines self-control. One of the first things that is affected is the ability to make good judgments and decisions. Many people who have been drinking may not realize how impaired they actually are, so they believe they are sober enough to drive. Others simply don't care after a few drinks, so they get behind the wheel and take their chances.

REALLY REALLY DRUNK DRIVERS

Most of the really bad accidents and fatalities that involve drunk driving are not caused by people who are at or just over the 0.08 BAC level. Many drunk drivers are way beyond those numbers, with blood alcohol content numbers two or three times the legal limit. These are people who are staggering, slobbering drunk, and can barely drive. These are the people who are apt to find themselves driving the wrong way on an expressway, driving without their lights on, weaving all over the road, driving at dangerous speeds on city and residential streets, missing or ignoring traffic signals and stop signs, passing in no passing zones, crashing into parked cars or running down pedestrians or bicyclists. These are the very real and all too common consequences of drunk driving.

DRUNK DRIVING STATISTICS

Some sobering but not necessarily surprising statistics about drunk driving:

Males outnumber females four to one.

According to the NHTSA, the highest percentage of drunk drivers involved in fatal accidents are ages 21 to 24 (27 percent), followed by ages 25 to 34 (26 percent), and ages 35 to 44 (23 percent).

Forty-two percent of drivers killed in alcohol-related crashes were 16 to 24 years old when they died.

Drunk driving accidents can happen any time of day or night, but 32 percent occur at night, with the span from midnight to 4 am being the most dangerous time.

Alcohol-related traffic fatalities are twice as likely to occur on a weekend compared to weekdays.

Nearly a third of those arrested for drunk driving are repeat offenders (many of whom were also driving on a suspended or revoked driver's license!). Fifty to 75 percent of convicted drunk drivers ignore the law and continue to drive with a suspended or revoked license.



A Breathalyzer will reveal your Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC). The legal limit in all 50 states is 0.08.

Drunk driving isn't just due to alcohol consumption. Drugs (marijuana, cocaine, crack, meth, pain killers, etc.) are involved in nearly one out of five fatal accidents. That's why law enforcement agencies issue DUIs for "impaired" driving as well as drunk driving.

IF YOU ARE ISSUED A DUI

If a person is issued a DUI as a result of a field sobriety test or a Breathalyzer test, it can have serious consequences:

The average fine for a first-time DUI can be as high as \$1000 to \$1500. For repeat offenders, fines are often two to three times higher! It may also result in jail time. You may also be charged with a felony if the DUI was a result of an accident that caused serious injury or a death.

A DUI can result in the loss of driving privileges, including a temporary suspension of your driver's license for 60 to 90 days or longer, or possibly a permanent revocation of your license if you are a repeat offender.

A DUI conviction will remain on your driving record for three to five years in most states.

If you have been convicted of drunk driving, you will have to buy expensive SR-22 car insurance, which may cost up to a thousand dollars or more than a normal auto insurance policy. You will also be required to remain on the expensive SR-22 policy for three years with no further convictions before your insurance rates go back down.

A DUI on your driving record may cause you to lose your job (a commercial truck driver, for example, or a school bus driver, taxi driver or ride share driver). It may also prevent you from applying for any type of job that requires a clean driving record.

A DUI may also require you to attend an alcohol and drug education class, and/or to receive alcohol/drug counseling.

Some states may also require your vehicle to be equipped with a special ignition interlock system that prevents the engine from starting if it detects alcohol on your breath. Some states may also pull your license plates to prevent you from driving.

DRUNK DRIVING HELP

If you were involved in an accident caused by a drunk driver, you should seek professional legal representation to make sure your rights are protected. This can help greatly with medical bills and insurance settlements. Don't sell yourself short when it comes to getting the compensation you deserve.

If you were caught drunk driving and given a DUI, you should also seek legal representation to minimize the impact a DUI can have on your driving record, your finances and your life. Don't go it alone. Hire an experienced DUI lawyer who can help you navigate the court system and possibly get the DUI dismissed.

DUI LEGAL RESOURCES:

DUI lawyers

DUI RESOURCES:

<https://madd.org> Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)

<https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812630> NHTSA DOT Crash Statistics

<https://www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/drunk-driving> NHTSA Drunk Driving Information

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