

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

NHTSA Report Presents Strategies to Reduce the Costs of Impaired Driving

In 1996, an estimated 2.7 million alcohol-related crashes occurred in the United States, according to the report "Impaired Driving in the United States." These crashes cost citizens more than \$110 billion, of which nearly half (\$56 billion) was paid for by people other than drinking drivers. While the United States has many important impaired driving laws, the report describes a number of additional strategies that could potentially reduce the costs of impaired driving. For example:

- Automatic license revocation by police or driver licensing authorities for the refusal or failure of a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) test would reduce fatalities by 6.5% and save an estimated \$44,000 per driver sanctioned.
- Graduated licensing for young, novice drivers would reduce youth fatalities by 5%-8% and save an estimated \$600 per youth driver.
- Breath-testing ignition interlocks for those convicted of driving while intoxicated would result in an estimated 7%-12% decrease in alcohol-related fatalities and save \$10,200 per vehicle equipped with these devices.
- Primary belt laws would allow police to stop and ticket a driver for not using a safety belt without requiring the driver to have committed another offense. Because unbelted drivers account for 75% of impaired driving fatalities, these laws could reduce alcohol-related fatalities by approximately 10%.
- Alcohol-related fatalities would be reduced by 8% if BAC limits were lowered to 0.08%. This measure would save approximately \$2 per licensed driver. (The recently approved federal transportation budget stipulates that states failing to adopt the 0.08% standard will lose a portion of their annual federal highway aid.)

The report also provides impaired driving cost estimates and prevention savings for each individual state, as well as a user's guide to state policymakers and community leaders in determining how the data can best be used in addressing impaired driving. For more information, view the report online at www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/alcohol/facts.htm.

SOURCE: Jensen A.F, Miller T.R., Covington K.L., *Impaired Driving in the United States*, Public Services Research Institute, 1999.

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