



SETTING LIMITS, SAVING LIVES BOOKLET DESCRIBES THE CASE FOR .08 BAC LAWS

In the United States, BAC (Blood Alcohol Concentration) levels are set by the states. The limit of .10 found in most states today is higher than many other countries.

BAC Levels in Other Countries

Austria	.08	Australia	.05-.08
Canada	.08	Finland	.05
Great Britain	.08	Netherlands	.05
Norway	.05	Sweden	.02
	Switzerland	.08	

A new 28 page booklet, *Setting Limits, Saving Lives*, sponsored by the National Safety Council and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) presents the case for lowering BAC levels to .08 in every state.

The Facts

Alcohol involvement is still the single greatest factor in motor vehicle deaths and injuries. Only 4 percent of all crashes involve the use of alcohol, but 41 percent of fatal crashes do. While there were 17,274 alcohol-related fatalities in 1995, another one million people are injured each year. And these crashes cost over \$45 billion every year for things like emergency and acute health care costs; long-term care and rehabilitation; police and judicial services, insurance, disability and workers' compensation, lost productivity; and social services for those who cannot return to work and support their families.

We Know What Works

We know what works to reduce

the incidence of impaired driving -- a combination of

- effective laws
- strong enforcement, and
- highly visible public information and education

Setting Limits, Saving Lives describes how BAC is measured, what .08 BAC means, and lists the alcohol-related fatalities for each state along with their BAC level and kind of law. There are definitions of the four key impaired driving laws (Illegal *per se*, Administrative License Revocation, Zero Tolerance, and .08 BAC) and results from evaluations of the effects of these laws. For example, four of the first five states that lowered their BAC limit from .10 to .08 showed significant decreases in alcohol-related fatal crashes. Today, 13 states have .08 *per se* limits for adults.

Effect of BAC on Traffic Crashes

With each drink consumed, a person's blood alcohol concentration increases. Although outward appearances vary, virtually all drivers are substantially impaired at .08 BAC. Laboratory and on-road research show that the vast majority of drivers, even experienced drivers, are significantly impaired at .08 on critical driving tasks such as braking, steering, lane changing, judgment and divided attention.

Crash statistics show that even heavy drinkers, who account for a high percentage of DWI arrests, are less likely to drink and drive because of the general deterrent effect of .08.

BAC and Areas of Impairment	
.10	
.09	
.08	Concentrated attention, speed control
.07	
.06	
.05	information processing, judgment
.04	coordination
.03	eye movement control, standing
.02	steadiness, emergency responses, tracking and steering
.01	divided attention, choice, reaction time, visual function



When NHTSA analyzed the effect of California's .08 law, the state experienced a 12 percent reduction in alcohol-related fatalities, and most of the driving population (81 percent) knew that the BAC limit was now stricter. Part of California's decrease was due to passage of an Administrative License Revocation law the same year.

Consumer Education and Public Support

The American public overwhelmingly supports legislation and programs to curb impaired driving. A 1995 NHTSA survey found that most (86 percent) think it is *very important* to do something to reduce drinking and driving and almost half (46 percent) think penalties should be *much more severe*. The booklet contains a section describing resources, organizations, approaches, and materials that can help lower the BAC levels.

Law Enforcement and Adjudication

One of the arguments that had been used against .08 is the impact the law might have on law enforcement and the judicial system. When the largest state, California, lowered the BAC limit to .08 there was little impact on court administrators or judges. Previously, those arrested for DWI with BACs below .12 typically were allowed to plea to reduced charges. When the limit was changed, this plea bargain "cut off" dropped. No increases were reported in the proportion of DWI defendants who pled guilty, requested jury trials, or appealed convictions.

Today's breath analysis equipment is easy to use during a roadside stop by law enforcement officers, regardless of whether the legal limit is .08 or any other limit. The .08 BAC limit is supported by two of the largest law enforcement organizations -- the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the National Sheriff's Association -- in addition to dozens of other national safety organizations.

Lives Saved

A .08 BAC level is not just a couple of drinks after work. It is a substantial amount of alcohol. At .08 BAC critical driving skills are impaired and the risk of a crash increases substantially. Most industrialized nations have adopted .08 or lower *per se* levels.

If every state adopted a .08 *per se* law, 500 to 600 lives would be saved every year according to a recent study, with thousands of injuries prevented and millions of dollars saved. Putting these huge numbers into terms easier to understand, consider that a drunk driving crash costs each innocent victim \$36,000, and compare this to \$30,000 for an assault; \$16,000 for robbery; and \$4,000 for motor vehicle theft.

The booklet concludes with a list of "What You Can Do" to become part of the activities in your state to reduce the BAC level to .08.

For a copy of *Setting Limits, Saving Lives*, write to the Office of Research and Traffic Records, NHTSA, NTS-31, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20590, or send a fax to (202) 366-7096.

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