

# NTSB MOST WANTED LIST

CRITICAL CHANGES NEEDED TO REDUCE TRANSPORTATION ACCIDENTS AND SAVE LIVES

2014

## ELIMINATE SUBSTANCE-IMPAIRED DRIVING

### What is the Problem?

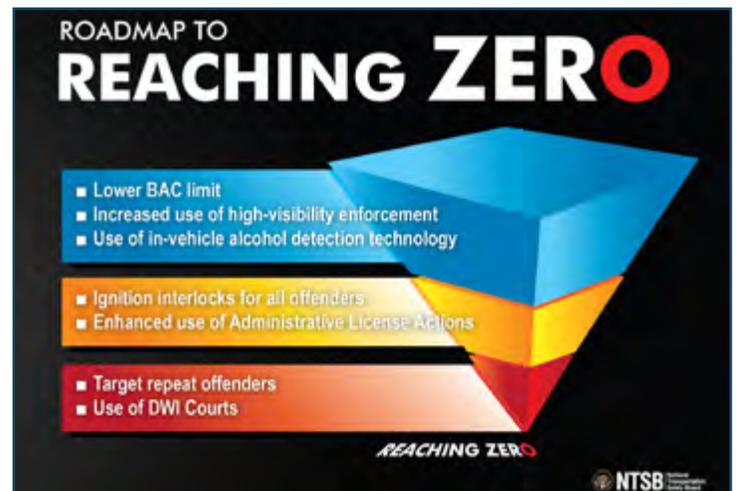
More people die on our highways than in any other mode of transportation. In fact, more than 90 percent – 33,561 in 2012, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration – of all transportation-related deaths are motor vehicle related. Many of these deaths are entirely preventable because they involve drug- or alcohol-impaired driving. In 2012 in the United States, more than 10,000 deaths (31 percent of all motor vehicle fatalities) involved an alcohol-impaired driver. In the past ten years, more than 119,000 people have died in crashes involving an alcohol-impaired driver.

Although substantial progress was made on this issue during the 1980s and 1990s, since 1995 the percentage of motor vehicle deaths that involve an alcohol-impaired driver has remained stubbornly stuck at about one-third. People impaired by alcohol are at a substantially greater risk of being involved in a motor vehicle crash, and those crashes frequently result in injury or death. Impairment does not start when a person's blood alcohol concentration (BAC) reaches 0.05 or 0.08 percent; it begins with the first drink. Yet according to the 2012 Traffic Safety Culture Index published by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, about 14 percent of drivers – one out of seven – admit to driving when they thought they were close to or over the legal BAC limit.

The problem of impaired driving is not just about alcohol; drugs also affect driving ability. Illegal, prescription, and over-the-counter drugs can have impairing side effects, often affecting each person differently. According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, roughly 10.3 million people admitted to driving under the influence of illicit drugs in the past year. According to the Fatality Analysis Reporting System, in 2009, 3,952 fatally-injured drivers tested positive for drugs.

### What can be done?

Despite progress made over the past three decades, the battle against substance-impaired driving is far from over. In order to prevent crashes, reduce injuries, and save lives, we need stronger laws,



This graphic conveys how our recommended set of targeted interventions addresses different populations: the general driving public, alcohol-impaired drivers, and repeat offenders.

swifter enforcement, and expanded use of technology. This starts with securing good data about substance-impaired driving and about the effectiveness of various countermeasures. BAC data collection and reporting must be improved, and a common standard of practice for drug toxicology testing must be developed and used.

Changing behavior can be achieved through countermeasures that promote both "general deterrence" and "specific deterrence." General deterrence encourages the general public to refrain from driving impaired. It includes such measures as a per se 0.05 BAC limit, high-visibility enforcement efforts, and administrative license revocation. Specific deterrence is used after a person is caught driving impaired and focuses on preventing repeat behavior. Examples of specific deterrence include fines and jail terms. In cases where an impaired driver has a substance abuse problem, however, neither fines nor incarceration are likely to address the root cause of the problem. Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) courts, with their emphasis on changing offender behavior, may be a useful approach to rehabilitating impaired drivers for whom other, traditional measures do not work.

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### What can be done? *con't...*

Technology also holds great promise in preventing and detecting substance-impaired driving. Passive alcohol sensors can help law enforcement officers identify dangerous drivers. Ignition interlocks can prevent an impaired person from driving a vehicle equipped with an interlock device. A promising in-vehicle technology for preventing alcohol-impaired driving completely, known as the Driver Alcohol Detection System for Safety (DADSS), is currently being developed.

### What is the NTSB doing?

The NTSB has long been concerned about impaired driving. Since 1967, we have issued more than 140 safety recommendations addressing various aspects of impaired driving. Today, the NTSB refers to this epidemic as substance-impaired driving, which includes the growing problem for drugged driving. In 2012, the NTSB began a year-long examination of the problem of substance-impaired driving and how to best address it.

Key milestones include:

- In May 2012, we held a [forum](#) to identify the most effective data-driven, science-based actions needed to “reach zero” crashes resulting from substance-impaired driving.
- In November 2012, we included Eliminate Substance-Impaired Driving among our ten top transportation safety priorities on the NTSB 2013 Most Wanted List. Later that month, we issued a series of [recommendations calling for improved data collection](#).
- In December 2012, we issued a [special investigation report on wrong-way driving](#) that revealed 60 percent of fatal wrong-way crashes involve impaired drivers; recommendations were issued calling for expanded use of technology such as ignition interlocks.

This review culminated with the release of “[Reaching Zero: Actions to Eliminate Alcohol-Impaired Driving](#)” in May 2013, that addresses the necessity of providing strong laws, improved enforcement strategies, innovative adjudication programs, and use of technology to prevent alcohol-impaired driving crashes and their deadly consequences. The report includes 19 new and reiterated safety recommendations calling for:

- Reducing the per se BAC limit for all drivers to 0.05 or lower
- Incorporating passive alcohol sensing technology into high visibility enforcement efforts
- Expanding the use of in-vehicle devices to prevent operation by an impaired driver
- Developing best practices for DWI courts and using other programs to reduce recidivism by repeat DWI offenders
- Establishing measurable goals for reducing impaired driving and tracking progress toward those goals

## Critical changes needed to reduce transportation accidents and save lives



National  
Transportation  
Safety Board

The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent Federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant accidents in other modes of transportation - railroad, highway, marine and pipeline. The NTSB determines the probable cause of the accidents and issues safety recommendations aimed at preventing future accidents. In addition, the NTSB carries out special studies concerning transportation safety and coordinates the resources of the Federal Government and other organizations to provide assistance to victims and their family members impacted by major transportation disasters.

