The State of Drunk Driving in the U.S.
Steady Progress Through the Years.

DOWN 53% SINCE 1982

Drunk driving fatalities have declined 53% from 1982 to 2014, and 27% over the past decade.

Drunk driving fatalities reached near record low levels (9,967) in 2014.

DOWN 75% SINCE 1982

While vehicle miles traveled have continued to increase, drunk driving fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles traveled have been declining since 1982, and are down 27% since 2005.

DOWN 47% SINCE 1982

From 1982 to 2014, while all driver deaths in motor vehicle crashes have declined 16%, drunk driver deaths have declined 47% during this same time period.

Historically, Most Alcohol-Involved Fatalities Include Drivers with High BACs

BAC LEVEL	% OF FATALITIES	BAC LEVEL	% OF FATALITIES	BAC LEVEL	% OF FATALITIES	BAC LEVEL	% OF FATALITIES
.01-.04	7%	.05-.07	6%	.08-.14	23%	.15+	64%
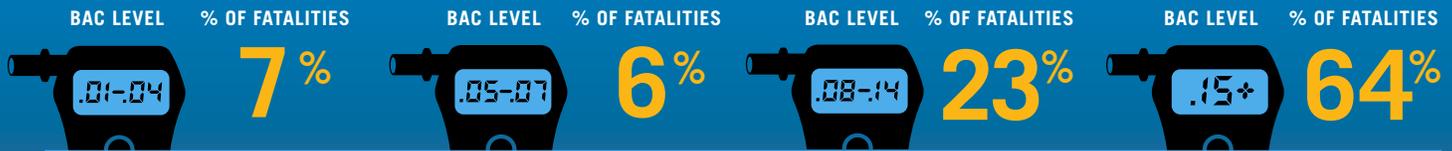
Source: NHTSA, 2014 FARS Data

The average BAC level for drinking drivers in fatal crashes was .16, a level that has not decreased in more than a decade.

.16 AVERAGE BAC

High BAC drivers (.15+ BAC) involved in fatal crashes were seven times more likely to have a prior driving while intoxicated (DWI) conviction than non-drinking drivers.

What won't work:
Targeting the wrong population

Lower BAC levels have minimal effect.

→ Research on .05 BAC levels only show impact when .05 is implemented with other countermeasures (e.g.,highly publicized enforcement). Studies do not consistently measure a reduction in alcohol-impaired fatalities.

→ Most alcohol-involved traffic deaths are caused by drivers at very high blood alcohol concentration (BAC) levels. Proven but often underutilized strategies such as mandatory assessment, ignition interlock devices and offender monitoring should be the priority for DUI offenders.

→ In every state, law enforcement can charge drivers with DUI at any BAC level if there is evidence of impairment.

A .05 BAC law will increase enforcement challenges and implementation costs.

→ At the current .08 BAC limit, there are 108 times more self-reported DWI trips (121 million) per year than there are DWI arrests (1.28 million). Lowering the BAC level further will only increase this gap in removing drunk drivers from the nation's roadways.

→ Effective enforcement will require revised tests and training to identify and measure BAC levels, especially since some drivers will display no visible signs of impairment.

→ Jail and prison overcrowding would worsen and overburdened court systems will be further strained which only increases "cookie-cutter" justice rather than the individualized approach needed to rehabilitate the most dangerous DWI offenders.

→ One of the most deadly and common realities our criminal justice system faces is the unmonitored DWI offender. Underfunded probation and parole systems already struggle to ensure DWI offender compliance with penalties.

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What We're For...What Works.

PREVENTION

Cars that won't start when driver is drunk *(.08+ BAC)*

Effective BAC levels
.08 — adults
.04 — commercial drivers
.00-.02 — under 21 yrs

BAC education

Safe ride programs

Designated driver programs

More training for practitioners

SWIFT IDENTIFICATION

High visibility enforcement

Mandatory alcohol screening/assessment

Pre-trial assessments *(alcohol, drugs and mental health)*

Recognize high BAC and test refusal as hardcore DWI offenders

Longer lookback periods *(10+ years)*

Pre-trial actions for repeat offenders

Restrict diversion programs and plea bargains

CERTAIN PUNISHMENT

Tailor sentence to individual

Utilize ignition interlocks

Avoid community service

Ensure sentence compliance

Intensive monitoring and supervision

DWI Courts for repeat offenders

Staggered sentencing programs

Enhanced penalties for hardcore drunk drivers and DWI child endangerment

EFFECTIVE TREATMENT

Dedicated detention facilities

Conduct comprehensive assessment

Develop individualized treatment plan

Alcohol monitoring for hardcore offenders

Incentives for offender success

Effective responses to relapse
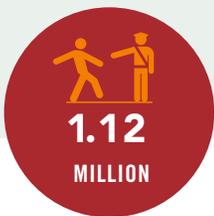
1.12 MILLION

At the current .08 BAC limit, there are 108 times more self-reported DWI trips (121 million) per year than there are DWI arrests (1.12 million).

The evidence of the lifesaving potential of .05 BAC laws in the United States is unclear and resource constraints already impede the criminal justice system's ability to effectively arrest, adjudicate and monitor DWI offenders. In the current system, many of the most dangerous offenders continue to slip through the cracks. Establishing a lower BAC level will divert precious resources and political will from proven effective countermeasures. At this time, the nation should be firmly focused on strengthening and expanding the use of evidence-based practices and programs.