

Consequences of Alcohol and Drug Use – Personal Injuries and Vehicle Incidents

Public attitudes about drinking and driving have changed dramatically in recent decades. What was once considered a normalized activity has become unacceptable to the majority of Canadians.

Saskatchewan has experienced a long-term trend of decreased alcohol-related casualty collisions. However, in 2008, the number of alcohol-related injuries, fatal collisions and deaths increased over the previous three year average. Through its Traffic Accident Information System, Saskatchewan Government Insurance (SGI) compiles information on traffic collisions (including alcohol-related collisions) occurring on Saskatchewan roads and reports on emerging trends.

- In 2008, alcohol contributed to 63 fatal collisions, representing a 46.5% increase from the previous three year average (43 collisions). More people were also injured in crashes involving alcohol. In 2008, there were 929 alcohol-related injuries, representing a 21.8% increase from the previous three year average of 763 injuries.
- Deaths from alcohol-related collisions have also increased. Alcohol contributed to 75 collision deaths in Saskatchewan in 2008, an increase of 63% from the previous three year average (46 deaths).

While significant progress has been made to reduce impaired driving in Canada, it remains a serious problem.

Although alcohol continues to be a dominant factor in motor vehicle collisions, injuries and deaths in Canada, there is growing evidence that drug-impaired driving is an increasing problem, warranting special attention.

- Public opinion surveys indicate that 17% of Canadian drivers report having driving within 2 hours of using a drug that could potentially impair their ability to operate a motor vehicle.
- The 2004 Canadian Addiction Survey indicates that 4.8% of drivers reported that, at least once in the previous year, they drove within two hours of using cannabis. This figure is more than double the 2.3% reported in the 1989 National Alcohol and Drug Survey. In the 16-18 year age group, 20.6% reported cannabis use prior to driving, compared with 19.6% who reported driving after drinking.
- A 2004 study showed that drugs, often in combination with alcohol, were detected in up to 30% of fatally injured drivers.
- The 2008 British Columbia Roadside Survey on drug and alcohol use among drivers, 10.4% of drivers showed evidence of drug use, while 8.1% of drivers tested positive for alcohol; 15% tested positive for drugs, alcohol or both. Cannabis and cocaine were the drugs most frequently detected.
- Another important finding from this survey was that while fewer moderate drinkers are choosing to drink and drive, more heavy drinkers are doing so, sometimes consuming up to three times the legal blood alcohol limit prior to driving.

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- New legislation came into effect in July 2008, providing police in Canada with the tools to enforce drug-impaired driving laws. The legislation calls for drivers to submit to a field test of impairment (Standardized Field Sobriety Test). If evidence of impairment exists, the driver must submit to further evaluation of drug influence by an officer trained in the Drug Evaluation and Classification program, including providing a sample of bodily fluid for analysis of drug content.
- Graduated licensing is one effective tool that assists in the promotion of zero tolerance of alcohol and drug use by new drivers. Addiction workers also play an important role in raising awareness of the harms and consequences associated with driving while under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs.

Sources:

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