



DrugFree@WorkPlace

Increase in Drug-Related Crashes

According to a recent report from the *Governor's Highway Safety Association*, the number of people in the U.S. dying in drug-related automobile accidents has increased dramatically. The study found that 44% of drivers killed in crashes had drugs in their system—that's up more than 50% from ten years ago.

A 2014 survey conducted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) revealed that approximately 20% of weekend, nighttime drivers tested positive for illegal, prescription, or over-the-counter medications. NHTSA also found that the number of drivers killed in crashes who tested positive for cannabis doubled from 2007 to 2015.

Another study funded by the *Foundation for Advancing Alcohol Responsibility* found that among drug-positive fatally-injured drivers, 38% tested positive for tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the component that gives marijuana its psychological effects; 16% tested positive for opioids; and 4% tested positive for both marijuana and opioids.

A Deadly Serious Problem

Law enforcement officers are concerned because they know the problem is even more serious than the data shows. Nationwide, many drivers who are involved in crashes—even those who are killed—are not tested for drugs. And when a fatally injured driver *is* tested, 51% are found positive for two or more drugs along with alcohol.

Additionally, when drivers who may be under the influence of alcohol and other drugs are arrested, they are often cited for a high blood alcohol concentration only, and are rarely tested for other substances.

Police know that if they can't get some help, the situation will only get worse.

The problem is that there is no breathalyzer for drugs like there is for alcohol, making it a huge challenge for law enforcement when it comes to identifying people driving under the influence of drugs. Compounding the problem is that while the nationally recognized level of impairment for drunken driving is .08 g/mL blood alcohol concentration, there is no similar national standard for drugged driving.

This makes it extremely difficult to use crash data to quantify how widespread the drugged driving problem is—because many states do not test for the presence of drugs, do not test for the same drugs, or do not test to the same cutoff levels.

This also means that the estimates of the number of people killed as a result of drugged driving—and the costs incurred—are always going to be much less than the actual numbers.

An Extremely Costly Problem

Drunk and drugged driving is a costly and important public health issue for states, state legislators, taxpayers, and companies, but all of the true costs are not being accurately measured.

According to the NHTSA, one alcohol-impaired-driving fatality occurs every 51 minutes in the U.S., and the annual cost of alcohol-related crashes alone is

more than \$44 billion. But according to Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), this estimate is far too low. MADD reports that drunk driving kills about 11,000 people and costs a total of \$132 billion every year in the U.S. And we all bear this cost.

Drugged and drunk driving costs everyone in America through increased taxes, higher insurance rates, lawsuits, and individuals and companies having to deal with the loss of family members and employees.

If a victim of a drugged or drunk driving crash can't work because of injuries, the company loses a worker, the employee loses wages, the government has to pay benefits to the injured worker, and the at-fault driver has legal costs. Many of these costs are never considered or tallied when estimating the cost to society of impaired driving.

The costs of emergency medical personnel at a crash scene is another expense that is rarely measured. Hospital costs, nursing home bills, doctor bills, and the cost of prescription medications for injured victims are not being accurately documented.

The price of property damage caused by drunk and drugged drivers is not being adequately tracked, and the quality of life costs are virtually impossible to measure because of the difficulty in putting a price on pain and suffering.

It is obvious that the costs to society of drugged and drunk driving is much more than most people realize. Something must be done to address this issue.

What Can Be Done?

State governments should partner with businesses to address the problem:

- Public health agencies, along with the pharmaceutical and marijuana industries, should educate their customers about the dangerous impairing effects of these drugs.
- States should explore methods to better collect crash and citation data to enhance driving under the influence of drugs (DUID) legislation and enforcement.
- Local government should create public awareness campaigns to change driver attitudes about driving under the influence of marijuana and opioids.
- Police officers must be better trained to recognize and deter drugged drivers.
- Companies should implement and maintain drug free workplace programs that provide drug prevention information and education to employees and supervisors.
- Companies should create and enforce safe driver policies.