

Remarks prepared for
Brian McLaughlin
Senior Associate Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America
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Good morning. I am delighted to be here and I bring warm greetings from NHTSA Administrator David Strickland. He was particularly disappointed he could not be here as he appreciates the long history of successful collaboration between NHTSA and CADCA, particularly in addressing impaired driving and underage drinking issues.

Every person in this room knows how important these issues are. Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for people ages 4 through 34. These are our children. And, because so many young people die in traffic crashes, they represent the third largest cause of years of life lost in our Nation, behind only cancer and heart disease.

Traffic fatalities result in more than 30,000 senseless deaths and drain more than \$230 billion from the economy each year. I challenge you to look at the data in your communities. You will find traffic crashes among the greatest causes of harm just about everywhere.

There is some good news. We are encouraged by the downward trend in the national numbers of the last few years. Our Nation has experienced some significant declines in both vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and traffic fatalities on our roadways. Fatalities have declined by about 20 percent in the last three years, which is a remarkable improvement. In addition, the fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled in 2009 reached the lowest level ever recorded in the United States.

But, even with these declines, the numbers continue to be much too high. In 2009, 33,808 lives were lost in motor vehicle crashes and nearly one-third of those deaths (10,839 of them) occurred in crashes that involved an alcohol-impaired driver (a driver or motorcycle rider with a blood alcohol concentration, or BAC, of .08 or greater).

You know as well as we do that impaired driving can involve alcohol, drugs or both. In 2009, about a third (32 percent) of all traffic deaths in the United States involved a driver above the legal alcohol limit. But we know that the problem doesn't stop there. We know that in many of these cases, the driver's impairment was exacerbated by the presence of drugs in addition to the alcohol.

The NHTSA Drug and Alcohol Roadside survey, released in 2009, found that 16 percent of drivers randomly tested at the roadside on weekend nights tested positive for the presence of drugs in their system. An analysis of fatal crash records that we released in December showed that nearly 4,000 fatally-injured drivers in 2009 tested positive for drugs that could affect the driving task.

These findings are of great concern . Unfortunately there are still unanswered questions about the role of drugs in causing crashes. There are challenges in

measuring impairment levels and determining impairment thresholds. But we know that under some circumstances drugs can impair driving and we are seeing their presence in far too many drivers. NHTSA has a number of research efforts underway to further our understanding in this area, including a study of the correlation of driver drug use and crashes. And we are working to refine our data systems to more accurately determine the size and scope of the drug-impaired driving problem.

We will continue to support other agencies as they work on efforts to determine impairment thresholds for drugs and, we will continue to support expanded use of DWI courts, and work with partners to support efforts to promote the use of Drug Courts. We have been working in partnership with the Office of National Drug Control Policy in their efforts to prevent drugged driving.

In fact on Monday night, Administrator Strickland attended an Institute for Behavior and Health Awards Dinner honoring ONDCP Director Gil Kerlikowske for his leadership in this area.

We are supporting our law enforcement partners with our Drug Evaluation and Classification (DEC) program. Under this program, NHTSA has prepared nearly

1,000 instructors and trained more than 6,000 police officers in 48 States to recognize symptoms of driver impairment related to use of drugs other than alcohol.

This is an advanced law enforcement training program that enables officers to detect drug impaired drivers. Following several weeks of training, certified law enforcement personnel serve as Drug Recognition Experts (DREs). The DEC Program is sponsored by NHTSA, administered and coordinated by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), and supported by the State Highway Safety offices, and State and local law enforcement agencies.

Additionally, our Advanced Roadside Impaired Driving Enforcement (ARIDE) program provides additional training for law enforcement officers to bridge the gap between the DEC program and Standardized Field Sobriety Testing. This is a major NHTSA initiative to help police to detect and detain drivers impaired either by drugs, or by alcohol.

We remain vigilant on many fronts in this effort as there are changing situations that could have an impact on our work – for example, the recent referendum in California on the legalization of marijuana. We are extremely pleased it was not

adopted , but this issue will likely crop up in other jurisdictions. We believe it could have a significant negative impact on the problem in any jurisdiction that were to adopt such a measure.

Another emerging issue of interest to CADCA's community coalitions is that of Older Americans. Older Americans value their independence and ability to drive, but face increasing mobility challenges. As the population in America ages, they could need more prescription or over-the-counter medications. Many prescription and over-the-counter medications can impair the ability to drive a vehicle. NHTSA will continue to develop and update a variety of resources to assist in this area, including medical guidelines, assessment tools, training protocols, and model screening programs.

At the other end of the driver spectrum, we place a great deal of emphasis on another high-risk segment: young adults (age 21-34) and youth (young drivers under the age of 21). NHTSA and CADCA have collaborated on a number of initiatives together, to address these high risk groups.

A little over a year ago, we supported the development of CADCA's Strategizer 54, *A Community's Call to Action: Underage Drinking and Impaired Driving*. The

Strategizer is meant to help prevention practitioners create multi-layered prevention and intervention strategies to curb underage drinking among teens, and to prevent impaired driving among young adults.

Developed in partnership with Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and NHTSA, Strategizer 54 provides the latest facts, strategies and resources that coalitions and MADD Affiliates can use to address these issues in their communities.

More recently, CADCA has partnered with NHTSA and other federal agencies, including NIAAA and CDC, to develop the strength of local coalitions to promote collaboration between researchers and communities to help prevent underage drinking and impaired driving. This effort is designed to provide a bridge between research and community practice.

Working with organizations like CADCA, and its coalitions across the country, can help us maintain the gains we've achieved, and potentially further reduce the number of lives lost in these senseless and preventable tragedies.

Finally, I would like to tell you about some technologies that are improving public safety today and could, potentially, eliminate impaired driving in the not too distant future.

A technology that is increasingly being used today is the ignition interlock. Nearly every State has enacted a law that calls for the installation of an ignition interlock on the vehicles of impaired driving offenders. In many States, interlock use is mandatory for at least some offenders. Fourteen States have enacted laws that require interlocks for all – even first-time – offenders.

Interlock use has been studied carefully for the past 20 years, and has been shown to be very effective at reducing recidivism among impaired drivers while the interlocks are in place.

Interlock use has increased over the last few years, rising to 212,000 in 2010. However, that number is just a fragment of the 1.4 million impaired driving arrests are made every year.

We ask you to strongly support and encourage increased use of these devices in your communities.

And there is even more hope for the future. NHTSA is currently engaged in a partnership with the auto industry to test the feasibility of advanced technology that may one day make it impossible for any driver to operate their vehicle impaired.

This technology is being tested under the Driver Alcohol Detection System for Safety (or DADSS) program. Under a \$10 million cooperative research effort, NHTSA and the Automotive Coalition for Traffic Safety (or ACTS), just recently completed a “proof of concept phase” and is planning to move forward to further explore the feasibility of developing technologies that potentially could be mass produced.

To be successful, this technology will need to be non-invasive to the user; extremely accurate, precise, repeatable, reliable, durable and relatively inexpensive.

While there is still much work to do and implementation (if achievable) would be many years away, the early results are encouraging. And so, there may come a time, perhaps 8 or 10 years or so from now, when impaired driving has become a

thing of the past; when vehicles themselves will prevent impaired drivers from harming themselves and others.

Such a day will certainly be celebrated, but until then, let's continue to work together, and do what we can to prevent underage drinking and impaired driving, keep our communities safe, and spare families the tragic consequences that result from these crashes.

Thank you.