

Remarks prepared for
David Strickland
Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

For the:
Office of National Drug Control Policy

Press Event

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Good morning.

It is a privilege and pleasure for me to be here today with Director Kerlikowske and Chief Lanier to address the issue of impaired driving.

Last week marked the beginning of the Holiday travel season and with it comes increased concern impaired driving, regardless of the source or cause.

Today, we are releasing numbers compiled by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration that provide insight on the scope of the

national drugged driving problem. This review shows that in 2009, 3,952 fatally injured drivers tested positive for the presence of drugs in their system. This represents 18 percent of the total 21,798 fatally injured drivers for that year. The report also shows the presence of drugs in fatally injured drivers increasing from 13 percent in 2005, to 15 percent in 2006, 16 percent in 2007, and 18 percent in 2008.

These numbers are cause for concern – but it is important to look at these results in context. Drug testing techniques and procedures are evolving. Currently, drug test

results are unavailable for a large portion of fatally injured drivers and, further, there is a wide variance among States and how widely they test for drugs. In fact, we have differences not only from State to State, but even jurisdictions within a state may vary from each other – testing for different drugs, using different test types, and employing different concentration thresholds for determining whether a test is positive or not.

Another important caveat for these numbers is that they indicate that drugs were found to be present in post-mortem examinations.

However unlike alcohol, where an impairment level has been clearly defined, drug presence does not necessarily imply impairment or indicate that drug use was the cause of the crash.

So while these numbers are cause for concern, much more research is needed to understand the extent of the problem. NHTSA has a number of research efforts underway, including a study of the correlation of driver drug use and crashes.

We are also supporting our law enforcement partners with our Drug Evaluation and Classification

or DEC program. Under this program, the agency 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 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 initiative of the agency to help police to detect and detain impaired drivers, either by drugs or by alcohol.

As our work is underway dealing with the science and policy issues with drug impairment, there is one thing the Director, the Chief and I know for sure. Personal responsibility is key. Whether it is a prescription drug, an illegal narcotic, or alcohol, if you are under the influence you are risking your life and the lives of others. Hand the keys to someone else.

With the aggressive leadership of Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood, we will continue to use every resource at our disposal to combat the threat posed by impaired driving.

Thank you.