



# National Survey of Drinking and Driving Attitudes and Behaviors

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration conducts the National Survey of Drinking and Driving Attitudes and Behaviors on a periodic basis to monitor the public's attitudes, knowledge, and self-reported behavior regarding drinking and driving. The 2008 survey was administered by telephone to 6,999 respondents 16 and older, with 5,392 interviews completed with respondents who were using landline phones and 1,607 interviews completed with respondents who were using cell phones. The survey over-sampled teenagers and young adults 16 to 24. Interviewing ran from September 2008 through December 2008.

## One Out of Five Are Drinker-Drivers

Twenty percent of the public 16 and older had in the past year driven a motor vehicle within two hours of drinking alcohol. About two-thirds of these, or 13% of the total population 16 and older had done so in the past 30 days. The survey produced an estimate of 85.5 million past-month drinking-driving trips, up from 73.7 million trips in 2004 and reversing a declining trend in such trips since 1995. More than three-fourths (78%) of the trips were made by males.

Those who reported driving within two hours of drinking in the past year tended to be more frequent drinkers than did other drivers who drink but do not drive afterwards. More than one in four (28%) drinking drivers usually consumed alcoholic beverages 3 or more days a week, compared to 10% of drivers who drink but do not drink and drive. While few 16- to 20-year-olds reported drinking and driving, those that did averaged 5.7 drinks per sitting during the times they drink alcohol (inclusive of all drinking occasions, not just drinking and driving). For 21- to 24-year-old drinking drivers, their average alcohol intake was 4.2 drinks per sitting. The average number of drinks dropped sharply again for 25- to 34-year-old drinking drivers (3.0), then declined more slowly across ensuing age groups.

The survey also produced an estimate of 17.2 million drivers (or 8% of all drivers) having driven one or more times in the preceding 12 months when they thought they were over the

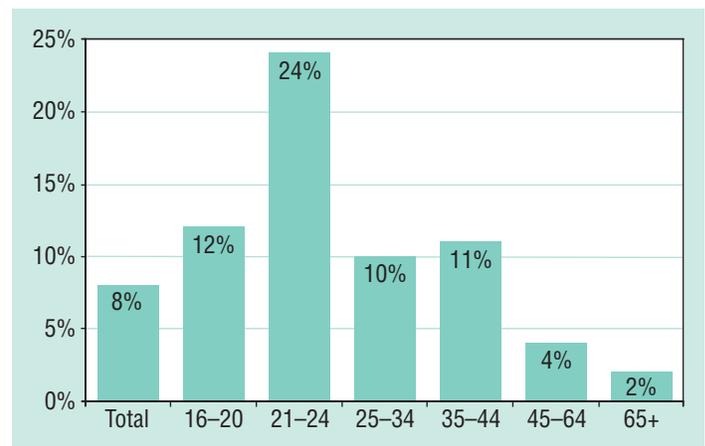
legal limit for alcohol and driving. These were mostly males, by a more than two-to-one ratio.

Several questions in the survey were used to classify a segment of the sample as problem drinkers. Problem drinkers composed 22% of past-month drinking drivers, but 36% (or 31 million) of past-month drinking and driving trips. Drinking drivers who were problem drinkers were almost twice as likely as other drinker-drivers to report driving at least once in the past year when they thought they were over the legal limit for alcohol and driving (56% compared to 24%).

## Riding With Unsafe Drivers in Past Year

Eight percent of the population 16 and older rode in the past year with a driver they thought may have consumed too much alcohol to drive safely. Young adult males (24%) were particularly at risk. Personal drinking behavior further defined the likelihood of riding with an impaired driver. Drivers who drink (10%) were about 3 times as likely as drivers who don't drink (3%) to have ridden in the past year with a driver they thought had consumed too much alcohol. Non-drivers who drink (24%) were about 8 times as likely as non-drivers who don't drink (3%) to have done so.

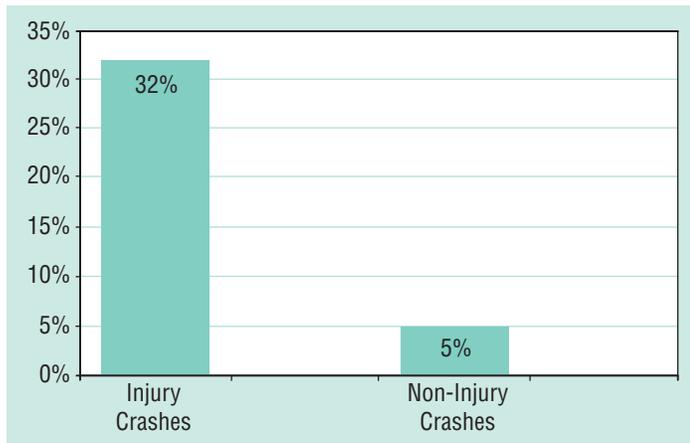
**Figure 1: Percent of Males Who Rode with Drivers They Thought May Have Had Too Much to Drink by Age**



## Reported Alcohol-Involved Crashes

Among persons 16 and older involved in a motor vehicle crash in the past two years, 20% reported that someone had been injured in the (most recent) crash. Respondents were more likely to report that an involved driver had been drinking alcohol if the crash led to injury (32%) than if no injury occurred (5%).

**Figure 2: Percentage of Crashes Reported to Be Alcohol-Involved**



## Perceptions of Drinking and Driving

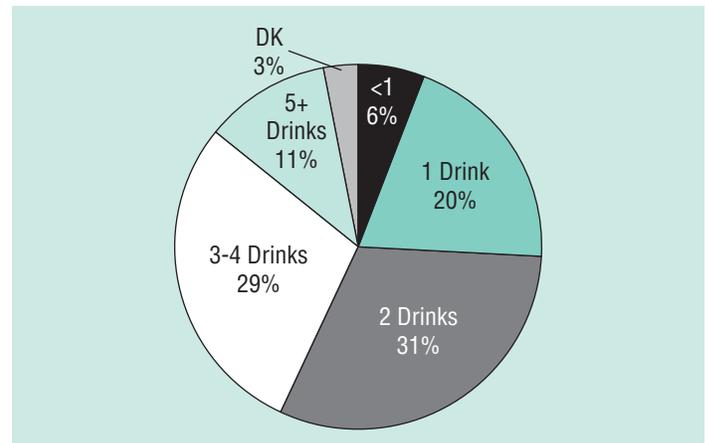
More than four out of five persons (81%) saw drinking and driving by others as a major threat to their personal safety and that of their families. The percentage was somewhat higher for females (85%) than males (76%).

Drivers who drink were asked to estimate the number of alcoholic beverages they could drink in two hours to reach the point at which it would be unsafe for them to drive. Forty percent believed it would be safe for them to have three drinks in a two-hour period before driving, with a portion of that 40% believing they could have more than three drinks.

## Enforcement of Laws

About 1% of the population 16 and older had been arrested for a drinking and driving violation in the past two years; the percentage was 5% for males 21 to 24. Almost three-fourths of the public believed that drivers who had too much to drink to drive safely would be somewhat likely (40%), very likely (21%), or almost certain (12%) to be stopped by police.

**Figure 3: Number of Drinks In Two Hours Before Unsafe to Drive**



DK=Don't Know <1=Less Than 1 Drink

Thirty percent of the public 16 and older had seen a sobriety checkpoint in the past year; 16% had gone through one. Most believed sobriety checkpoints should be conducted weekly (40%) or monthly (35%). Forty percent believed the penalties for violating the drinking and driving laws should be much more severe; 26% believed they should be somewhat more severe.

Of eight anti-DWI interventions read to respondents, alcohol interlocks ranked highest in the percentage who said they would be very effective (63%). When asked if there was a national minimum drinking age (MDA) in the United States, 71% said "yes." Of those who said there was a MDA, 86% correctly identified it as 21.

## How to Order

For a copy of *National Survey of Drinking and Driving Attitudes and Behaviors: 2008. Volume I: Summary. Volume II: Findings. Volume III: Methodology* prepared by Insight Policy Research, Inc. and Gallup, Inc. write to the Office of Behavioral Safety Research, NHTSA, NTI-130, 1200 New Jersey Avenue SE., Washington, DC 20590, or send a fax to 202-366-7394, or download from [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov). Alan Block was the project manager for this study.



U.S. Department of Transportation  
**National Highway Traffic Safety  
Administration**

1200 New Jersey Avenue SE., NTI-132  
Washington, DC 20590

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