

## ***Short-Term License Suspensions for Drinking Drivers*** **Report Fact Sheet**

### **The Problem**

- In 2004, 815 Canadians died in crashes involving alcohol.
- Despite substantial decreases during the 1990's in crashes and fatalities involving drinking drivers, recent progress has been limited.
- In the Traffic Injury Research Foundation's 2006 Road Safety Monitor, more than one in six Canadians reported having driven at least once in the past 30 days within 2 hours of having consumed any amount of alcohol.
  - 7.7 per cent of survey respondents — representing an estimated 1.7 million Canadians — reported having driven when they thought they were over the legal BAC (Blood Alcohol Concentration) limit at least once in the past year.
- Canadians see drinking and driving as a major social problem and traffic safety problem, according to the 2006 Road Safety Monitor.

### **Purpose of Current Study**

- To evaluate the effectiveness of short-term suspensions at the roadside for drinking drivers with BACs above 0.04 per cent but below 0.08 per cent, implemented in Saskatchewan on August 1, 1996. Similar laws are in place throughout Canada. Specifically, the study:
  - Evaluated the general deterrence impact and specific deterrence impact of the Saskatchewan law
  - Characterized drivers who had been issued short-term suspensions
  - Surveyed police officers about their use of and attitudes toward the use of short-term suspensions at the roadside

### **Findings**

General deterrence: Is the short-term suspension law associated with overall decreases in drinking and driving?

- The number of fatally injured drivers in Saskatchewan with BACs between 0.04 per cent and 0.08 per cent decreased after the introduction short-term suspensions; however, this decrease could have been associated with a pre-existing trend and could not be attributed to the short-term suspensions.

Specific deterrence: Does receiving a short-term suspension reduce a person's propensity to drive after drinking in the future?

- Of Saskatchewan drivers who received a short-term suspension during the first two years of the law, three of every four of those who had not been convicted previously of impaired driving remained free of drinking-driving offences during the 5+ year follow-up period. This suggests that there may have been some specific deterrence for these drivers. Additionally, their rate of subsequent *Criminal Code* impaired driving offences was lower than that of Saskatchewan drivers who received a *Criminal Code* impaired driving charge.
- Of those who had been convicted of impaired driving previously and received a short-term suspension during the first two years of the short-term suspension law, 100 per cent received a subsequent short-term suspension and/or impaired driving charge during the follow-up

period. This suggests that short-term suspensions have no specific deterrence impact for drivers with prior impaired driving convictions.

#### Characteristics of drivers issued short-term suspensions

- Surveys of drivers showed that those receiving short-term suspensions and those convicted of impaired driving represented distinctly different groups. Drivers receiving short-term suspensions reported drinking more frequently than drivers receiving impaired driving charges; however they also reported consuming fewer drinks on occasions when they drink, relative to those charged with impaired driving. They were also found to have fewer alcohol-related problems than drivers charged with impaired driving.

#### Police attitudes about and use of short-term suspensions

- Officers issued short-term suspensions and Criminal Code impaired driving charges in similar numbers.
- Officers indicated they sometimes used discretion in issuing short-term suspensions when impaired driving charges may have been warranted, particularly in cases when there may have been insufficient evidence to pursue criminal charges.

#### **Recommendations:**

More research on the use of short-term suspensions at the roadside is needed to determine if these suspensions have a statistically significant impact on drinking and driving.

This AAA Foundation-sponsored study was conducted by the Douglas J. Beirness, Ph.D. and Deanna Singhal of the Traffic Injury Research Foundation in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Dr. Beirness is now with Beirness and Associates, Inc.