

Substance-Impaired Driving

Background

Substance-impaired driving is a national traffic safety concern. Alcohol impaired-driving deaths still account for almost a third of all motor vehicle traffic fatalities in the United States every year, and driver impairment by drugs other than alcohol is a rapidly growing threat.

According to the latest (2013–14) National Roadside Survey from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), active THC (the psychoactive ingredient of marijuana) among nighttime weekend drivers has risen by nearly 25 percent since the previous survey in 2007.

In addition, the 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health reported that an estimated 12.6 million people ages 16 and older reported driving under the influence of illicit drugs at least once during the prior year.

Using data on traffic-related arrests and fatalities, researchers have shown that marijuana is the most frequently detected psychoactive substance among driving populations during after-school hours.

Overview

- **Alcohol** is a drug that impairs thinking, reasoning and muscle coordination when it reaches the human brain. These abilities are essential to operating a vehicle safely. (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration)
- **Teen Drivers** (15–19 years of age) have the highest rate of motor vehicle crashes among all age groups in the United States. (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration)
- **Marijuana** use impairs many aspects of cognitive and physical function that are necessary for safe driving. It can affect attention, reaction time and coordination. Mixing alcohol and marijuana may produce effects greater than either drug on its own. (AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety)
- **Safe use of marijuana by drivers does not exist.** Marijuana can affect people differently, making it difficult to develop consistent and fair guidelines for impairment. There is no science to show that drivers reliably become impaired at specific levels of THC (i.e., the psychoactive ingredient of marijuana) in the body. Depending on the person, drivers with relatively high levels of THC in their system might not be impaired, while others with low levels may be unsafe behind the wheel. It is also important to consider that people who use marijuana cannot accurately determine how much THC is in their system. (AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety)
- **If you remember nothing else, know this.** If you have consumed drugs (including alcohol), you should not drive. If you plan to drive, you should never consume alcohol or any other drugs. Use of drugs, including alcohol by a driver puts that driver, their passengers, and other road users at risk. (AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety)

