



## July 2022 Newsletter

### Drunk Driving Deaths Increase by 14%!

By Pamela Erickson

Over the years we have made substantial progress on drunk driving deaths, but that was reversed during 2020. As the chart below illustrates, we made good progress from 1985 when there were 18,125 deaths due to an alcohol-impaired driver. In 2019, there were 10,196. We even dipped below 10,000 deaths in 2011 and 2014. But, 2020 seemed to reverse this downward trend. Impaired deaths zoomed up to 11,654; and, the percentage of alcohol-impaired fatalities shot back up to 30%. The increase in impaired-caused fatal crashes in 2020 represents a 14% increase over 2019.

Year	Total fatalities	Alcohol-impaired crash fatalities	
		Number	As a percent of all crash deaths
1985	43,825	18,125	41%
1990	44,599	17,705	40
1995	41,817	13,478	32
2000	41,945	13,324	32
2005	43,510	13,582	31
2010	32,999	10,136	31
2011	32,479	9,865	30
2012	33,782	10,336	31
2013	32,894	10,110	31
2014	32,744	9,943	30
2015	35,485	10,320	30
2016	37,806	10,967	29
2017	37,473	10,880	29
2018	36,835	10,710	29
2019	36,355	10,196	28
2020	38,824	11,654	30

*National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Annual Report Tables*

I live in the Las Vegas area and we read about such deaths regularly...and Nevada doesn't even have the worst record among states. But it does illustrate some of the problems that are causing deaths to spike.

Here are some factors involved in fatal crashes in the Las Vegas area:

**Alcohol and speed:** Last fall, an NFL Raiders player was clocked at **156 miles per hour** in a residential area shortly before he hit another car killing the driver and her dog. While the car was a Corvette, I wasn't aware that cars could go that fast. So, my first question is: Why would car manufacturers make a car that could go 156 miles per hour when there is nowhere in the United States that one can legally drive that fast? According to Quora (a knowledge sharing website), "There is no state in the US that allows vehicles to travel at 100 mph. The highest speed limit in the US is 85 mph and that is only on Texas State Highway 130." (See reference to Quora in Sources.) Should a state register a car that can go that fast? Perhaps there should be a special license for "Supercars". But speed is a major problem in Las Vegas and other cities in the Southwest where roads are wide and go straight for long stretches in residential areas. And, often the impaired driver will run a red light going at a high rate of speed. Alcohol greatly increases the risk of speeding.

**Risky serving practices:** A commercial real estate broker was attending a "charity" golf tournament which featured liberal alcohol service beginning at 9 in the morning. By mid-afternoon, the man was drunk and admitted that he started drinking at 9 am. He and several passengers got in a car and headed to another party. They didn't make it as they crashed, killing one of the passengers and injuring others. What "charity" would be so careless with serving alcohol? And, if they served all day, wouldn't they try to ensure no one drove drunk? What kind of license does such a charity have and can the licensee be sanctioned? (Nevada has no dram shop law for adults and liberal alcohol service at "charity golf events" is common.) In another case, a woman was served 5 shots of tequila before she got in her car, blew a stop sign, and hit another car. The driver of the other vehicle died at the scene and his 3-year-old child was severely injured. My experience is that most licensees are good people. I remember one stating he did not like

competing with licensees that encourage excess consumption. Proper regulation of one day or limited “charity” licenses must be ongoing to prevent practices that encourage short term overconsumption, versus a retailer’s long-term interest in their alcohol license. The licensed alcohol system places great responsibility on securing and maintaining a license.

Regulators/legislators must be careful when licensing charitable events as sometimes servers are inexperienced at responsible service. Such a situation can lead to dangerous practices.

**Large number of deaths, including children:** It is particularly disturbing when an impaired driver causes several cars to crash and the death toll is high. Recently, an impaired driver traveled over 100 mph, ran a red light and hit several cars. Nine people, including five children, died from that crash. The driver, who died in the crash, was impaired by alcohol, cocaine and PCP, an all-too-common mix of impairing substances. Seven of those who died were from a single family. They had gone to a park while the mother was working. She lost four children, two step-children and a brother. Imagine that one day you have several children and the next day you don’t. The pain is unimaginable.

**Changing Consumption and Product Mixes:** The rise of cannabis use has made “apples to apples” comparisons for drunk driving difficult; however, all states that have made cannabis more available are seeing dangerous driving related to cannabis consumption. Since there is no roadside test for cannabis use and impairment, law enforcement may be mixing statistics by recording accidents, arrests, fatalities as alcohol related when it’s a mixture of substances. Much greater research and technology is needed. Likewise, the increase in the last few years in consumption of more potent forms of alcohol such as liquor may be having profound impacts on liver cirrhosis and on drunk driving rates, as greater alcohol consumption takes place. More research on this is also needed.

**Resources to help change the tide:** Fortunately, there is a growing recognition of this problem. To determine what you and your fellow citizens can do, learn about new insights and resources:

- **CAP webinar:** Recently the Center for Alcohol Policy conducted a free webinar on this topic. It was led by

J. T. Griffin who has over 20 years’ experience in this area, most recently as MADD’s Executive Vice President for government relations and communications. This [webinar](#) is available on the Center for Alcohol Policy website. It is a good source for a review of recent history with DUI and what we need to do now.

**Three key takeaways from this webinar include:**

1. **Look upstream** and consider solutions that can prevent drunk driving from ever occurring in the first place. Making sure that **alcohol is consumed safely and properly** and that it is **sold in a way that does not encourage excessive consumption**.
  2. Consider **applying for funding** through the [Safe Streets and Roads for All](#) (SS4A) Grant Program.
  3. Review the Center’s recent [national survey](#) on alcohol regulation where **56% of Americans want lawmakers to evaluate broader impact before implementing permanent changes to alcohol laws**.
- **Safe Streets and Roads for All grants:** Ensure that appropriate officials in your state know about this program and consider applying. Funds available include \$5-6 billion in grants over the next 5 years. Details of this program can be found at [Safe Streets and Roads for All](#) (SS4A) Grant Program.
  - **Grass-roots Support:** Remember how MADD got things changed initially. Victims became leaders and worked with others. Americans can do great things when they come together and attack a problem.

**Sources:**

[Drunk Driving](#), National Highway Traffic Safety Administration  
[Safe Streets and Roads for All Grant Program](#), U.S. Department of Transportation  
[Background on: Alcohol-impaired driving](#), Insurance Information Institute  
[What is it like to drive over 100 mph?](#), Quora.com  
[Dram Shop Laws in Nevada](#), Eric A. Stoval, Ltd  
[Center for Alcohol Policy » Traffic Safety Webinar Roundup](#)  
[Driver in crash that killed 9 had drugs, alcohol in system](#), Las Vegas Review Journal  
[Las Vegas woman downed 5 tequila shots before deadly DUI](#): report by Joshua Rhett Miller, Las Vegas Review-Journal, June 3, 2022.  
[Alcohol flows at charity golf events in Las Vegas, players say](#) | Las Vegas Review-Journal (reviewjournal.com)