

National Roadside Survey of Alcohol and Drug Use by Drivers

Executive Summary

A new survey of alcohol and drug use by drivers shows the average proportion of drivers on the road during weekend nighttime hours who have alcohol or drugs in their systems.

The survey was conducted during 2013 and 2014 at a representative sample of 300 locations across the country. More than 9,000 drivers participated in the voluntary and anonymous survey. This was the fifth such survey on driver alcohol use conducted since 1973. This is the second such survey that has collected information on the use of drugs that could affect driving, including both illegal and legal drugs.

Alcohol Findings

The new survey found that the use of alcohol by drivers continues to decline. In 2013/2014, about 1.5 percent of weekend drivers had blood alcohol concentrations at or above the legal limit of .08 breath alcohol concentration (BrAC) and 8.3 percent of drivers had a measurable amount of alcohol in their systems.

The proportion of drivers during weekend nighttime hours who are at or above the legal limit of .08 BrAC decreased by 80 percent between 1973 and 2013/2014. The proportion with any measurable amount of alcohol in their systems dropped by about 77 percent. While the estimates of alcohol prevalence in 2013/2014 are down from 2007 for low (.005 to .049 BrAC), medium (.050 to .079 BrAC) and high (.08+ BrAC) levels, the change is statistically significant only at the medium BrAC levels.

Drug Findings

Participating drivers were tested for a large number of potentially impairing drugs using both oral fluid (saliva) and blood samples. The proportion of nighttime weekend drivers with illegal drugs in their systems was 15.2 percent in 2013/2014 while the proportion with prescription or over-the-counter medications that could affect driving was 7.3 percent. The proportion of total drug-positive nighttime weekend drivers increased from 16.3 percent in 2007 to 20.0 percent in 2013/2014, a significant increase.

The drug showing the greatest increase from 2007 to 2013/2014 was marijuana (THC). The percentage of THC-0positive drivers increased from 8.6 percent in 2007 to 12.6 percent in 2013/2014, a proportional increase of 47 percent.

Survey Participation

The National Roadside Survey collected information from volunteer drivers at 300 research checkpoints across the Nation. The survey methods were reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board and all data was completely anonymous. Drivers were free to pass by the research site or pull in to find out details of the survey. A small fee (up to \$60) was offered to compensate drivers for their time. About 85 percent of drivers who pulled into the research site chose to provide breath samples, more than 70 percent provided oral fluid, and over 40 percent chose to provide blood samples.