



Class 10

Impaired Driving

Making Choices and Taking Responsibility to Say “No”

Alcohol and other drugs are major factors in fatal motor vehicle crashes for individuals between 15 and 24-years of age. Alcohol use among youth can spiral into a series of problems including poor driving performance, poor academic achievement, disruption of classroom learning, family life, as well as delinquency or other problems with society and unlawful behaviors. Consequently, the younger students begin use, the more likely they are to abuse, become dependent upon, or move onto more extreme drug use.

It is important to recognize the use of alcohol and other drugs as a serious problem related to operating a motor vehicle. Evidence demonstrates that combining alcohol with driving is a leading problem among drivers.

Each student should recognize the potential for injury and make reduced risk decisions regarding the use of alcohol and other drugs. Although alcohol use is a choice made by people, laws and enforcement agencies control the use of alcohol and other drugs.

Consequences of using alcohol or other drugs and driving

Consequences of high risk decisions are sometimes not known by the driver or passenger until after the collision happens to them.

Twenty-four percent of 15 to 20-year old drivers involved in fatal crashes were drinking.

Drivers age 21-24 have the highest percentage of alcohol use involved in fatal crashes. Drivers age 25-44 have the second highest number of alcohol-related fatal crashes.

Young people who drink and drive have a greater chance of being in a crash than older drivers because alcohol usually affects young people more and young people have little experience in both drinking and driving.

The greater the blood alcohol concentration (BAC), the greater the risk of being involved in a fatal crash. BAC is the concentration of alcohol in a person’s bloodstream. Young drivers between the ages of 16 and 19 with a BAC of .02 to .05 percent (one to two drinks) are at least seven times more likely to be killed in a crash than a sober driver of any age.

If you are arrested for drinking and driving, the penalties are severe. Your driver’s license may be suspended, you may be fined or you may have to serve a prison term.

Making Choices and Taking Responsibility to Say “No”

Stopping another person from driving drunk

If you are going to try to control the drinking of others, you must recognize that:

- You have a responsibility to prevent your friends from drinking to excess.
- You must be willing to brave the resistance of the drinker or others in the group.



Never let a friend or relative drive if s/he has been drinking. If they have been drinking:

- Take his/her keys away
- Arrange for a driver who has not been drinking
- Call a cab
- Have him/her stay overnight, if possible

Alternatives to drinking and driving

- **Do something else** – involve friends in activities other than drinking – dancing games, board games, video games, outside activities, etc.
- **Stay home** – the best way to avoid having to drive home is not to leave home in the first place.
- **Agree on a designated driver** – choose a person in advance who will be the designated driver and will not drink or be sure a sober person drives home.
- **Plan to stay overnight** – stay at someone’s home so no one has to drive.
- **Call someone for a ride** – if you cannot drive, call a friend, parent, spouse or relative
- **Find a ride** – get a ride from a sober friend, call a taxi, or use public transportation.

Your State's Alcohol Laws and Penalties

The instructor should refer to his/her state's vehicle law and then relay important information about driving and the use of drugs and alcohol.

The following is intended to give the instructor ideas about what to cover.

- Intoxication – a physiological state that occurs when a person has a high level of alcohol in his or her blood, the legal blood alcohol concentration is determined by state law.
- Measurements
- Operating a vehicle while intoxicated or under the influence
- License restriction (alcohol use)
- Illegal use of a license
- Violation of restriction penalties
- Loss of license
- Court fines
- Jail
- Implied consent and refusal laws – a law that requires a driver charged with being under the influence to take a chemical test that measures the amount of alcohol in the blood.
- Preliminary Breath Test (PBT)
- Request by police officer
- Test failure/refusal
- Zero tolerance rules and regulations

Effects of Alcohol on Space Management

- **Searching** – the prime sense humans use in driving is vision. Even low levels of alcohol (.03) have been found to reduce this ability. Alcohol affects vision in a number of ways. This is particularly important since about ninety percent of what a driver “identifies” is by use of his or her eyes. The prime reason for visual problems after use of alcohol is lessened muscular control. Alcohol relaxes the fine muscles of the eye that focus and control eye movement.
- **Eye focus** – the human eye has the ability to change focus rapidly from objects close to the viewer to objects far away. Alcohol delays this process; thus, a driver may experience difficulty, especially at higher speeds.
- **Double vision** – although humans have two eyes, each eye must work in conjunction with the other. Alcohol impairs this coordination and may produce a double image. Some drivers close one eye to cope with this, but this greatly affects the next two areas— distance judgment and side vision.
- **Distance judgment** – a driver must be able to determine how far objects are from his or her path of travel. This is complicated by movement of other objects. Alcohol reduces the ability to judge distance accurately.
- **Side vision** – sometimes called peripheral vision, this ability is critical to the driving task. A person’s central vision is very narrow so a driver must be able to take in a number of things to each side of his/her path of travel. Speed also reduces side vision.
- **Visual acuity** – this is sharpness of vision. Alcohol may make images blur for the driver and thus impair the ability to identify properly what is in the traffic scene.
- **Color distinction** – a driver gets much information from different colors in the traffic scene. Red is used on three types of signs: stop, yield, or some prohibition of action. If alcohol is impeding a driver’s ability to determine accurately the color of a sign or traffic light, problems in information processing will occur.
- **Night vision** – humans have limited night sight at best, and alcohol reduces this ability further. In addition, alcohol reduces the control of light entering the eye. This is important, since drivers must adapt from the situation of no oncoming light to that of headlights shining in their eyes.
- **Slowed response time** – alcohol slows a driver’s ability to process information and respond to critical driving tasks.
- **Impaired motor skills** – a driver’s eye, hand, and foot coordination is impaired by alcohol.

Factors that Affect BAC Level

Two people can drink the same number of drinks, but the percentage of alcohol in the blood depends on a number of factors.

- **Gender** – alcohol affects females more than males. The effects tend to be stronger and last longer.
- **Body weight** – a heavier person will have a lower BAC because the person has more body fluids with which the alcohol will mix.
- **Size of drink** – a larger drink will contain more alcohol and result in a higher BAC than a smaller drink
- **Food** – food can slow the rate at which the alcohol is absorbed, but the alcohol consumed gets into the blood eventually
- **Time spent drinking** – the faster a drinker consumes alcohol, the more quickly BAC will reach its peak
- **Alcohol content** – the more alcohol content in a drink, the higher the BAC will rise



Greater Risk Taking after Drinking

Based on what has been identified, drivers must evaluate what others will do and what they should do. The brain must process the information identified and make accurate evaluations.

It is often difficult to determine where “search” stops and “evaluation” starts. Both involve the brain and thinking process and experimentation has shown that levels of alcohol as low as .03 reduces these abilities. One aspect of this process is the willingness of a driver to take risks.

Alcohol tends to produce more aggressive behavior and, thus, poor decisions. It is possible for a driver to search and evaluate correctly, yet fail to execute properly. While alcohol affects thinking and judgment first, it also affects muscular actions, whether in the eyes or arms and legs. After drinking, drivers tend to lose fine muscle control. This is often shown by failure to maintain their vehicles in a straight line (weaving). When they brake, they brake too hard or not enough. When they steer, they may steer too much or fail to return the wheel properly.

Common Signs of the Drinking Driver

- Turns in a wide radius
- Straddles center or lane marker
- Almost strikes an object
- Weaves
- Drives on shoulder of roadway
- Swerves
- Slow speed
- Stops for no apparent reason
- Follows too closely
- Drifts
- Tire on center or lane line
- Brakes erratically
- Drives into opposing or crossing traffic
- Signals inconsistently
- Responds slowly to traffic signals
- Illegal or abrupt turns
- Rapid acceleration and/or deceleration
- Drives at night with lights off
- Fails to dim high beam headlights

Elimination of Alcohol

There is no way to get all the alcohol or other drugs out of the circulatory system to become sober quickly. Coffee, fresh air, cold showers or eating will not help to remove the alcohol or other drug combination from the circulatory system. Time is the only medically-proven method to remove alcohol or other drug combinations from the system. It can take 1 ½ hours or longer for the body to eliminate one drink from the system. The best advice is not to drive a vehicle of any kind if alcohol or other drugs are consumed. Impairment starts with the first drink.

Alcohol is removed in three ways:

- **Breath** – approximately 8 percent of alcohol is eliminated by breathing
- **Sweat** – about 2 percent of alcohol is eliminated by sweating
- **Oxidation** – the majority of alcohol (90 percent) is removed by the liver

Drugs Other than Alcohol

There are other drugs that can affect your ability to drive safely. These drugs can have effects like those of alcohol, or even worse. These drugs include:

- **Over-the-Counter Medications** – those that can be purchased legally without a prescription. Always read the label carefully, especially if intending to drive. Some medications may cause drowsiness or impair driving ability. If you are not sure it is safe to take the drug and drive, ask your doctor or pharmacist about any side effects.
- **Prescription Medications** – must have a written note from a doctor to obtain these medications, includes antidepressants, pain reducers, sleep aids, sedatives. Check the label on the prescription and packaging before you take a drug for warnings about its effect. They can hinder your driving ability by reducing your level of alertness or ability to perform complex tasks. If you are not sure if it safe to take the drug and drive, ask your doctor or pharmacist.
- **Illegal Drugs** – against the law to purchase, possess and consume illegal drugs, impacts your driving and can affect your reflexes, judgment, vision and alertness in ways similar to alcohol.

Effects of Drugs other than Alcohol on the Driving Task

Perception - This involves giving meaning to human senses of vision, hearing, etc. Unless a driver accurately understands what he/she sees, it is impossible to react appropriately. Both amphetamines and cocaine can cause perceptual problems.

Judgment - Accurate decisions are based on a driver's ability to assess and judge a given driving situation. Poor judgments often result in collisions.

Coordination - Drivers must coordinate hand, eye and foot movements to operate a motor vehicle successfully. Loss of such ability greatly handicaps performance.

Vision - Vision is the key to information gathering and processing and safe driving. Visual impairments make it difficult to search, evaluate and execute appropriately.

Mood - A driver's mood may cause him/her to take unnecessary risks or be so lethargic as to fail to act correctly in a dangerous situation.

Effects of marijuana

Drug most often found in drivers involved in crashes (after alcohol) and because more research data is available on marijuana than other drugs, specific attention is provided. Effects include:

- **Loss of tracking ability** - This is the ability to maintain the vehicle in a given line.
- **Distance judgment** - Following too closely can cause problems.
- **Vigilance** - Not remaining attentive to the driving task can cause a driver to follow too closely, drift into another lane, etc.
- **Divided attention** - Driving is a task which requires constant but changing attention to traffic, roadway and weather conditions, passengers, gauges, etc.

Mixing alcohol and drugs

A driver should never drink alcohol while taking other drugs. These drugs could multiply the effects of alcohol or have additional effects of their own. These effects not only reduce the driver's ability to operate a vehicle, but could cause serious health problems, even death.

The key factor to remember is that any change a drug produces may also cause a lessening of driving ability. Drugs should never be mixed with alcohol because of a possible synergistic effect (chemical reaction between two or more drugs that may produce a reaction greater than either drug alone).