50 Years, 25,000+ Dead, Since First Anti-drink Drive Ad

Friday 7 November, 2014

"Don't ask a man to drink and drive" – that was the plea of the government's first ever public information film on the dangers of drink driving, 50 years ago. Since then, drink drivers over the legal limit have killed at least 25,000 people and seriously injured at least 130,000 in the UK[1] – but as these casualties have only been recorded since 1979, the complete figures are likely to be tens of thousands higher.

Casualties have fallen dramatically since the first drink drive ad, but drink driving remains one of the biggest killers on our roads. Brake, the road safety charity, is using the anniversary to highlight the ongoing menace of drink driving and call for zero-tolerance to help stamp it out for good. *See calls for action below*.

With its appeal to women not to let their partners drink drive, the 1964 advert is a product of its time, but its message remains as relevant as ever. To this day, men account for more than three quarters (77%) of drink drive casualties[2]. What has changed is the message about how much is too much, with research having demonstrated the huge danger of drinking even small amounts and driving[3]. While the 1964 advert warns of the risks of drinking four to six whiskies, today Brake's not a drop campaign urges people to stay off the alcohol altogether if driving.

Drink drive (over the legal limit) casualties have steadily decreased, from 1,640 dead and 8,300 seriously injured in 1979, to 230 dead and 1,200 seriously injured in 2012 (latest available figures)[4]. They now account for one in eight road deaths (13%) compared with a quarter in 1979[5].This is partly thanks to public education campaigns such as those by the Department for Transport's road safety agency, THINK! – it's estimated these prevented almost 2,000 deaths and over 10,000 serious injuries from 1979 to 2009[6].

Julie Townsend, deputy chief executive, Brake, said: "Public education is critical to tackling road deaths and injuries, not just those caused by drink driving, so it is vital the government continues to fund this work. However, it is shocking that even though drivers are now well informed of the dangers, many continue to get behind the wheel after a drink, causing an unacceptable death toll and horrendous suffering for those who are left bereaved or injured. That's why we need a zero-tolerance drink drive limit – to send a clear message that any amount of alcohol makes you unsafe to drive – with tougher penalties and enhanced traffic policing to enforce it. Think – how many more lives will be destroyed or ruined if we don't act now?"

Brake campaigns for a zero-tolerance drink drive limit of 20mg alcohol per 100ml blood through its not a drop, not a drag campaign, and is urging all political parties to make this a key manifesto commitment for the 2015 general election. Tweet us: @Brakecharity, hashtag #NotADrop.

Facts

One in eight deaths on UK roads are caused by drink drivers over the current legal limit[7] of 80mg alcohol per 100 ml blood. Drivers with even 20-50mg alcohol per 100ml of blood are at least three times more likely to die in a crash than those with no alcohol in their blood[8]. This is because even small amounts of alcohol affect drivers' reaction times, judgment and co-ordination. Alcohol also makes it impossible for drivers to assess their own impairment because it creates a false sense of confidence and means drivers are more inclined to take risks and believe they are in control when they are not[9]. *Read more facts*.

Brake's advice

Even very small amounts of alcohol affect drivers' reaction times and hazard perception, making them much more likely to crash, even if they don't feel drunk or even tipsy. The only way to ensure you're safe is to not drink any alcohol before driving, and never drive the morning after having more than one or two drinks. As a passenger, only accept a lift with a driver who's had no alcohol at all.

Planning ahead to get home safely will help avoid getting into an awkward or risky situation, such as having to refuse a lift from a driver who has had alcohol. If you're getting a lift back from a BBQ, party or night out with someone, make sure they are 100% on board with not having any alcohol at all. Always have a plan B just in case a designated driver lets you down, or arrange from the outset to get a taxi or public transport instead.

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Calls for government action

Brake calls for a zero tolerance drink drive limit of 20mg alcohol per 100ml of blood, to send a clear message that it should be none for the road. This allows for naturally occurring alcohol in the body, and is a limit set by numerous other countries including Sweden, Poland and Greece. The EU recommends a limit of no more than 50mg, and within the EU only Malta shares the UK's limit of 80mg. Governments in Scotland and Northern Ireland have announced intentions to reduce their limits to 50mg, and in Northern Ireland, newly qualified drivers and commercial drivers will have a zero tolerance limit of 20mg.

Brake

Brake is a national road safety charity that exists to stop the needless deaths and serious injuries that happen on roads every day, make streets and communities safer for everyone, and care for families bereaved and injured in road crashes. Brake promotes road safety awareness, safe and sustainable road use, and effective road safety policies. We do this through national campaigns, community education, services for road safety professionals and employers, and by coordinating the UK's flagship road safety event every November, Road Safety Week. Brake is a national, government-funded provider of support to families and individuals devastated by road death and serious injury, including through a helpline and support packs.

Brake was founded in the UK in 1995, and now has domestic operations in the UK and New Zealand, and works globally to promote action on road safety.

Road crashes are not accidents; they are devastating and preventable events, not chance mishaps. Calling them accidents undermines work to make roads safer, and can cause insult to families whose lives have been torn apart by needless casualties.

End notes

[1] Reported drink drive accidents and casualties (estimates): Great Britain, annually from 1979, Department for Transport, 2013
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/ras51-reported-drinking-and-driving

[2] Reported road casualties Great Britain 2012, Department for Transport, 2014

[3] Review of effectiveness of laws limiting blood alcohol concentration levels to reduce alcohol-related road injuries and deaths, National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, 2010

[4] Reported drink drive accidents and casualties (estimates): Great Britain, annually from 1979, Department for Transport, 2013
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/ras51-reported-drinking-and-driving

[5] Reported road casualties in Great Britain: estimates for accidents involving illegal alcohol levels: 2012 (final), Department for Transport, 2014

[6] Department for Transport: How thirty years of drink drive communications saved almost 2,000 lives, Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, 2012

[7] Reported road casualties in Great Britain: estimates for accidents involving illegal alcohol levels: 2012 (final), Department for Transport, 2014

[8] Review of effectiveness of laws limiting blood alcohol concentration levels to reduce alcohol-related road injuries and deaths, National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, 2010

[9] ibid

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