More Than 400 People A Month Arrested For Drug-driving In England And Wales, IAM Reveals

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The Institute of Advanced Motorists (IAM) has revealed for the first time the true scale of drug-driving in the UK since new laws came into force – and showed that over 400 people a month have already been arrested for this offence.

The IAM made a Freedom of Information request asking every police force area in England and Wales for the number of arrests made for the new offence (of driving with a specified controlled drug in the body above the specified limit for that drug), since it was introduced on 2 March 2015.

The IAM's findings show 902 drug-drive arrests in total were made by forces in England and Wales. On average police arrested almost one person every three days for this crime.

In addition the results that have come through have shown there is little consistency in testing and arrests across England and Wales, with figures ranging from 200-plus in one police force down to zero in others.

The Metropolitan Police recorded the highest number of arrests, with 214 in just over two months which equates to three drivers every day since the law was changed. Next up was Northumbria Police with 97, then Cheshire Constabulary with 70, Sussex Police with 58 and South Yorkshire Police with 55.

At the opposite end of the scale Leicestershire Police, Warwickshire Police and Gwent Police have yet to make any arrests at all for this offence in the first two months of its existence.

A full list of results from each police force is at the end of this press release.

The new laws introduced in England and Wales on 2 March set limits at very low levels for eight drugs commonly associated with illegal use, such as cannabis and cocaine. Eight prescription drugs were also included within the new law including diazepam, methadone and morphine.

Police are able to use a "drugalyser" to screen for cannabis and cocaine at the roadside. Even if a driver passes the roadside check, officers will still be able to test at a police station for ecstasy, LSD, ketamine and heroin as well as other drugs.

According to the 2010 North Report which looked at the prevalence of illicit drug use among drivers in Great Britain, drugs could be a factor in as many as 200 deaths every year, and six per cent of drivers aged between 17 and 39 claimed to have driven at some time whilst under the influence of drugs (quoted in reference 1).

Sarah Sillars, IAM chief executive officer, said: "I am sure the majority of law abiding drivers would like to know why there is such a variation in the data we have received from police forces. It would be unfortunate if some people got the idea that some areas are softer on drug-driving than others.

"It is very clear from our survey that the new drug driving law has just scratched the surface of a much bigger issue. It would seem Sir Peter North has been proved correct when he said there is a significant drug-driving problem which is out of all proportion to the number of accidents reported to the police. We are delighted that the legislation has been introduced and people are being caught.

"We have reached a point where drink-driving has become socially unacceptable, particularly amongst younger people. We now need a sustained campaign to back up the police enforcement effort and ensure drug-driving is seen in exactly the same way. The effects of driving under the influence of drugs can be devastating."

Here is the full table of the numbers of drivers caught by each police force in England and Wales:

Police Force/Drug driving arrests/Time period monitored (from-to)

Avon and Somerset/12/2 March-6 MayBedfordshire/4/2
March-18 May
Cambridgeshire/10 /2 March- 1 May
Cheshire/70/2 March-17 May

City of London/3/2 March-12 May
Cleveland/21/2 March-28 May
Cumbria/No responseDerbyshire/No responseDevon
and Cornwall/12/2 March-13 May
Dorset/No responseDurham/23/2 March-4 May
Dyfed-Powys/5/2 March-30 April
Essex/Not available (see reference 2)
Gloucestershire/No responseGreater Manchester/26/2 March-11 May
Gwent/0/1 April-30 April
Hampshire/32/2 March-18 May
Hertfordshire/15/2 March-30 April
Humberside/10/2 March-30 April
Kent /20/2 March-5 May
Lancashire/10/2 March-11 May
Leicestershire/0/2 March-21 May
Lincolnshire/3/2 March-30 April
Merseyside/24/2 March-30 April
Metropolitan/214/2 March-11 May
Norfolk/5/2 March-5 May
Northamptonshire/4 /2 March-30 April
Northumbria/97/2 March-30 April
North Wales/34/2 March-20 May
North Yorkshire/4/2 March-31 May
Nottinghamshire/20/2 March-30 April
South Wales/8 /2 March-30 April
South Yorkshire/55/2 March-30 April
Staffordshire/No responseSuffolk/11/2 March-30 April
Surrey/43/2 March-7 May
Sussex/58/2 March-30 April
Thames Valley /4/2 March-6 May
Warwickshire/0/2 March- 30 April
West Mercia/18/2 March- 30 April
West Midlands /11/2 March-1 May
West Yorkshire/9/2 March-29 April
Wiltshire/7/2 March-8 May

ENDS

Reference 1:
http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100921035225/http:/northreview.independent.gov.uk

Reference 2: Essex Police stated they were unable to extract specific drug-drive data from their drink/drugs-drive data, and they were not obliged to extract drug-drive data under the Freedom of Information Act.

The IAM is the UK's largest independent road safety charity, dedicated to improving standards and safety in driving and motorcycling. The commercial division of the IAM operates through its occupational driver training company IAM Drive & Survive. The IAM has more than 200 local volunteer groups and over 90,000 members in the UK and Ireland. It is best known for the advanced driving test and the advanced driving and motorcycling courses. Its policy and research division offers advice and expertise on road safety.

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