

Government Urges States to Lower Allowable Blood-Alcohol Levels for Drivers



The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) on Tuesday recommended states lower allowable blood-alcohol levels for drivers, from 0.08 percent to 0.05 percent.

The NTSB said thousands of people are killed or injured each year by drivers who are not legally drunk, but who are still impaired, The New York Times reports. Currently about 10,000 people die in alcohol-related car crashes each year.

A person with a blood-alcohol level of 0.05 percent is 38 percent more likely to be involved in a crash, compared with someone who has not been drinking, according to the NTSB. A person with a 0.08 blood-alcohol level is 169 percent more likely to be involved in an accident.

The board made a number of other recommendations, such as requiring everyone convicted of drunk driving to put a Breathalyzer interlock device in their car.

A person's blood-alcohol level depends on factors including their weight, gender, and the contents of their stomach. An 180-pound man usually can have four beers or glasses of wine in 90 minutes without reaching the 0.08 percent limit. It would take three drinks for him to reach the 0.05 percent limit. For a 130-pound woman, the average number of drinks needed to reach the limit would be lowered from three to two under the proposed change.

The American Beverage Institute opposes lowering the blood-alcohol limit. "Moving from 0.08 to 0.05 would criminalize perfectly responsible behavior," Managing Director Sarah Longwell told the newspaper. "Further restriction of moderate consumption of alcohol by responsible adults prior to driving does nothing to stop hard-core drunk drivers from getting behind the wheel."

Most industrialized countries have a 0.05 percent limit, the article notes.

"The research clearly shows that drivers with a BAC [blood-alcohol concentration] above 0.05 are impaired and at a significantly greater risk of being involved in a crash where someone is killed or injured," NTSB Chairman Deborah A.P. Hersman said in a news release.