

DID YOU KNOW???

ALCOHOL A FACTOR IN PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE COLLISIONS

When a pedestrian or a bicyclist is involved in a collision with a motor vehicle, the vehicle is almost always the winner. And, we tend to blame the driver for the incident and seldom ticket the pedestrian or the bicyclist.

Of interest in traffic safety are the results of a recent study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) that showed 35 percent of pedestrians fatally injured had a blood alcohol concentration of 0.08 percent or higher. For bicyclists, the percent with a BAC of 0.08 or higher was 21 percent.

Previous research has shown that crashes involving pedestrians or bicyclists are more likely to result in death or serious injury when the pedestrians or bicyclists have been drinking. Alcohol impairment contributes to poor decision-making, which can lead to dangerous pedestrian behavior — for example, crossing a street at a dangerous time or location. Alcohol also degrades psychomotor skills, which are important for riding a bike.

Even so, there has been a decline in pedestrians and bicyclists killed or injured with a BAC at 0.08 or higher from 1982 to 2014; the largest decrease in alcohol impairment among walkers and cyclists was for people ages 16-20. Alcohol impairment among fatally injured pedestrians in that group fell from 41 percent in 1982-86 to 25 percent in 2010-14. Among fatally injured bicyclists of that age, it fell from 18 percent to nine percent.

Much of the decline for younger people is likely due to changes in state laws that raised the legal drinking age to 21. In the past, many states had lower drinking ages, but since 1988 the drinking age has been 21 in all states and the District of Columbia.

"Education and enforcement campaigns aimed at reducing impaired driving may give people the erroneous impression that walking or riding a bike is a safe alternative," says IIHS Senior Research Scientist Angela Eichelberger, the study's lead author. "The public needs to be better informed about the dangers of alcohol impairment for anybody on the road."

Alcohol (and drugs) is only one aspect of collisions involving pedestrians and bicyclists. The incorrect perception that pedestrians have the right-of-way is a serious contributing factor. I have too often watched young pedestrians push the button to activate the flashing beacons when crossing W. Main St. in Malone at the corner of Webster St. (at the "Y") and just step into the street, usually looking at their smart phone, without any regard that a driver just may not be paying attention to the pedestrian, a recipe for disaster. As a pedestrian or bicyclist, we need to pay attention to the potential for injury at all times, as this group will almost never win in a collision with a vehicle.

The IIHS provided information in their April "Status Report" publication contributing to this article. As always, we thank that institute for their safety information.

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