

DID YOU KNOW???

IMPAIRED DRIVING CRASHES ON NYS ROADWAYS

Last week's article discussed Utah's introduction of legislation, which, if passed, would lower the legal BAC limit for DWI from .08 to .05 in that state. This article explores a bit further into impaired driving and the profile of an impaired driver from the results of a study on impaired driving crashes on New York roadways during the five-year period 2011-2015. The study was performed by the Institute for Traffic Safety Management and Research (ITSMR) and funded by the NYS Governor's Traffic Safety Committee.

The study focused on two key objectives. The first objective was to determine the extent to which alcohol and/or drugs play a role in fatal and personal injury motor vehicle traffic crashes on New York roadways. The second objective was to identify the characteristics of the drivers who had alcohol and/or drugs in their system at the time of the crash.

Some of the key results of the study are interesting. For instance, the number of impaired driving fatal crashes has remained fairly constant (427-438) over the five-year period, representing 40%-41% of all fatal crashes. In each of the five years, three-quarters of the drivers who had alcohol and/or drugs in their system were men and one-quarter were women. With respect to age, the largest proportion of these drivers each year were ages 21-29, followed by drivers ages 30-39; in 2015, 33% of the drivers were ages 21-29 and 24% were ages 30-39.

An impaired driver doesn't cause a crash just because he/she is impaired; there are other factors involved, mainly as a result of the inability to drive prudently resulting from the alcohol or drugs. For instance, of the crashes caused by impaired drivers, 28% were also charged with unsafe passing, improper lane usage, or unsafe lane changing, 18% with a speed-related infraction, and 12% with failure to keep right.

In examining other factors, including those where no tickets were written, the analyses showed that "Unsafe Speed" was a factor associated with one-quarter (24%) of these drivers, followed by "Passing/Improper Lane Usage/Unsafe Lane Changing" (12%). "Driver Inattention/Distraction" was a factor associated with 7% of the drivers.

Maybe the most important result found from the study is that we are no longer reducing impaired driving fatal crashes in New York State. The study showed no change over the five-year study period, with fatalities remaining at between 400 and 450 annually. Another disturbing factor is that too high a percentage of our younger drivers are driving impaired. Somehow we need to do better. Maybe Utah's lead will be the key.

Thanks to the NYS Sheriffs' Association, the Governor's Traffic Safety Committee, and Franklin County Sheriff Kevin Mulverhill for providing information for this article.

For more information on traffic law and safety, go to the traffic safety board's web site at: www.franklincony.org and click on "Traffic Safety Board" under departments then look for Did You Know articles under "services". You may also email me at: dwerner151@verizon.net