

Why all the fuss about impaired driving?

The statistics tell the story. In 2001, an estimated 38,000 high school seniors in the U.S. crashed while driving under the influence of marijuana and 46,000 crashed while driving under the influence of alcohol.

It gets worse. A teenage driver with a BAC in the 0.05 to 0.08 percent range is far more likely to be killed in a single-vehicle crash than a sober teen. In fact, it's 17 times more likely for males and seven times more likely for females. At higher BACs, the death rate rises to 52 times more likely for males and 15 times more likely for females.

Is it worth it?

If those are your odds, we don't think so.

Here are some sites that have more information for you.

Campaign for Alcohol Free Kids –

www.alcoholfreekids.com/au_dedication.html

MADD – www.madd.org/home/

National Commission Against Drunk Driving – www.ncadd.com/

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration –

www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/alcohol/

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism –

www.niaaa.nih.gov/

National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign – www.freevibe.com

Remove Intoxicated Drivers – www.rid-usa.org/

Students Against Destructive Decisions – www.saddonline.com/

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services –

ncadi.samhsa.gov/govpubs/prevalert/v6/1.aspx



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IS IT WORTH IT?



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IS IT WORTH IT? GIVEN WHAT'S AT STAKE, WE DON'T THINK SO.

It was a proud day for you. In fact, it was a great day. It was the day you passed your driving exam and got your driver's license. Good for you. You did all the right things to pass. You studied. You took the classes. You practiced behind the wheel.

Now, with your parents' consent, you can go where you need to go without relying on family and friends. Just think about it ... the freedom ... the excitement ... the independence.

And you can throw it all away with just one beer or by using drugs that one time.

Blood alcohol content (BAC) laws for teenagers

The blood alcohol content (BAC) allowed by law in most states is 0.08 percent. That's for adults, age 21 or older. It's an entirely different set of laws if you're under 21. For teenagers, ANY blood alcohol level is strictly illegal. The reason is simple: since you cannot legally drink alcoholic beverages, there's no reason why you would have blood alcohol content. If you get stopped with the smallest amount of alcohol in your body, you can be treated exactly like an adult with 0.08 percent BAC.

Using drugs is always illegal

At any age, using marijuana or any other drugs is against the law. Research shows that smoking pot affects concentration, perception, coordination and reaction time. As a new driver, you need all of these skills to be their sharpest for safe driving.

Zero-tolerance laws

In 1995, Congress passed a law requiring all states to adopt zero-tolerance laws. By 1999, they all had. What does zero tolerance mean to you? It means that if you are under 21, it is illegal for you to drive with any measurable amount of alcohol in your body. And remember, it is always illegal for you to drive with any drugs in your body. The laws will be strictly enforced.

What can happen?

Laws vary by state, but in addition to suspension or revocation of your driver's license, the penalties for underage drinking and driving and for drug-impaired driving can be severe.

- If you buy alcohol or drugs, have them in your possession or are caught using them, you can face a fine and see your license suspended or revoked.
- If you drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs or drive while intoxicated, you can be fined, made to do community service and have your license suspended or revoked.
- If you have a fake i.d., you can be fined.
- If you tamper with your driver's license, you can be heavily fined and even face jail time.

It should be remembered as well that, in all states, repeated offenses carry escalating penalties.

Other possible penalties

Repeat offenders:

- could be placed in a detention facility.
- could be placed in a residential facility.
- could be placed in a weekend intervention program for referrals to treatment.
- could be placed on probation which may include:
 - restricted access to or use of a car.
 - forbidden use of alcohol or illegal drugs.
 - limited access to certain places and persons.
 - mandatory submission to searches.
 - questioning and giving information about others.
 - mandatory permission to travel.
 - following a curfew.
 - providing blood samples or urine tests.

Administrative license suspension

Administrative license suspension (ALS) is a relatively new tool that law enforcement officials use to combat drunk or drug-impaired driving by both adult drivers and those under 21. As of June 2003, 41 states had some form of it, but it's an idea, according to many law enforcement officials, whose time has come.

Though the exact wording of ALS laws can vary by state, they generally permit police to confiscate the license of any driver who fails a chemical test for alcohol or refuses to take one. The police give the driver a notice of suspension which acts as a temporary permit to drive until the suspension is appealed. If the suspension is not appealed or if the appeal fails, then the license is suspended for up to one year. Longer suspensions can be triggered for repeat violators.

ALS differs from traditional suspension because it is an administrative action for refusing or failing the chemical test. It is not the result of a judicial process. It is based on the long-held principal that driving is a privilege, not a right. The state issues a driver's license when certain administrative criteria are met. Failure to meet the criteria — in this case failing or refusing the chemical test — permits the state to take an administrative action. It should be noted that ALS laws do not replace possible criminal charges which would be handled through the courts.

Costs add up

Another thing to consider is the expense. What if you have to get a lawyer? What will a suspension do to your insurance rates? They're already high, and a suspension could kick them right through the ceiling — assuming you can find a company to insure you.