



**THE ROAD SAFETY MONITOR 2008**  
DRINKING AND DRIVING  
NATIONAL



The knowledge source for safe driving

**About the poll.** These results are based on the RSM, an annual public opinion poll developed and conducted by TIRE. A total of 1,201 Canadians completed the poll. Results can be considered accurate within plus or minus 2.9%, 19 times out of 20. The majority of the questions were answered using a scale from one to six where six indicated high agreement, concern, or support and one indicated low agreement, concern or support.

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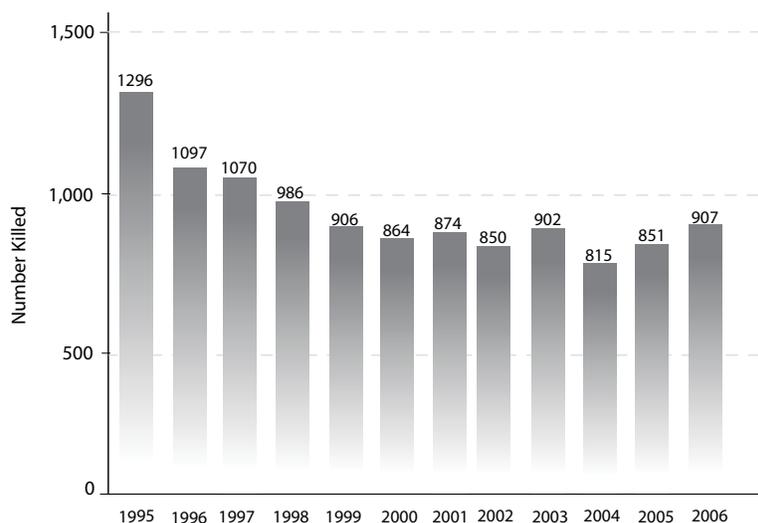
L'Association des  
brasseurs du Canada

# DRINKING AND DRIVING IN CANADA

This fact sheet summarizes national results from *The Road Safety Monitor (RSM)*, 2008 on drinking and driving in Canada. The RSM is an annual public opinion survey conducted by the Traffic Injury Research Foundation (TIRF) under sponsorship from Transport Canada and the Brewers Association of Canada. The survey takes the pulse of the nation on key road safety issues by means of a telephone survey of a random, representative sample of Canadian drivers. Regional results on drinking and driving across the country are contained in a companion series of fact sheets. Overall, national and regional results did not differ significantly and the emerging trends in each of the regions are comparable to national trends.

**How many Canadians die in traffic crashes involving a drinking driver?** In 2006, the most recent year for which data is available, 907 Canadians were killed in a traffic crash involving a drinking driver. This represents an increase since 2005. There have been steady declines from 1,296 in 1995 to 850 in 2002. However, the number of persons killed in a traffic crash increased in 2003, decreased in 2004, and then increased in 2005, and continued to increase in 2006. It is evident that much of the substantial decrease through to 2002 occurred during the 1990s. Since 2000 progress has been slower, and the 2005 and 2006 data suggest that progress has halted.

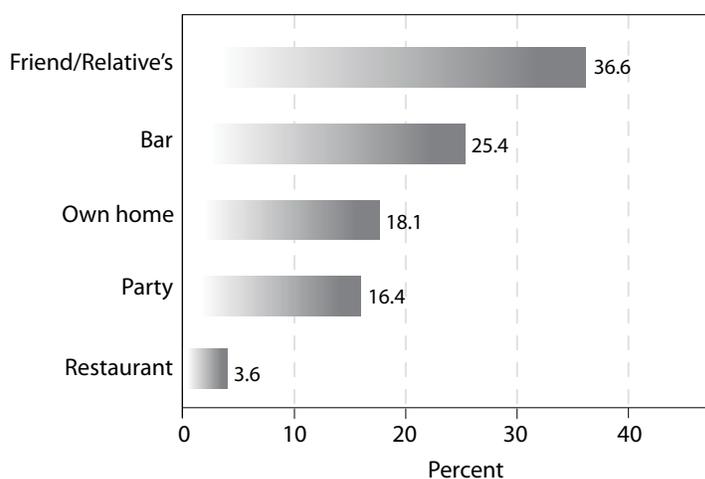
**Is the percentage of drinking drivers increasing?** When asked about driving after consuming any amount of alcohol in the past 30 days, 18.1% of Canadians admitted to doing this in 2008. This represents an increase from 2006 to 2008 which further suggests that progress in the fight against drinking and driving has halted. Although consistent declines were achieved from 1998 (19.3%) through 2003 (15.8%), the percentage increased in 2004, declined again in 2005, but has steadily increased once more in 2006, 2007 and 2008, making this a reason for concern.



Source: Mayhew et al. (in press)

When asked about driving when they thought they were over the legal limit in the past 12 months, 5.2% of Canadians admitted to doing this in 2008. From 1998 to 2004 there was a steady decreasing trend in the percentage of drivers who admitted to this behaviour. However, from 2005 to 2007 the percentage increased from 5.6% in 2004, to 8.2% in 2007. The drop in 2008 to 5.2% appears to be considerable. Although such a large decline may be encouraging, it is too soon to tell whether the percentage of drivers who admit to driving when they thought they were over the legal limit in the past year is truly declining or not.

**Where do drivers do most of their drinking?** In 2008, over a third (36.6%) of those who drove when they thought they were over the legal limit report doing most of their drinking at the home of a friend or relative; about one quarter (25.4%) report doing most of their drinking at a bar; 18.1% report doing most of their drinking in their own home; 16.4% report doing most of their drinking at a party; and 3.6% report doing most of their drinking in a restaurant. Such a pattern suggests a variety of messages and approaches may be needed to influence behaviour and reduce driving after drinking.



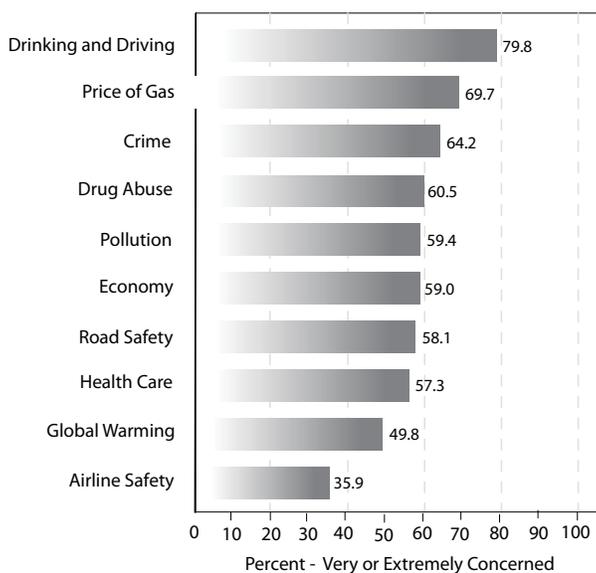
**How many Canadians have been a passenger in a vehicle driven by someone who has been drinking?** Within the last month, 6.2% of Canadians indicated that they had been a passenger in a motor vehicle driven by someone who has been drinking on one occasion, and 6.4% indicated that they had been a passenger on two such occasions. These passengers are putting themselves at risk. Even when blood alcohol concentrations (BAC) are low, the risk of being in a crash and the seriousness of potential injuries increase substantially.

**How many Canadians are affected by drinking and driving?** Almost one quarter (22.3%) of Canadians - an estimated 7.5 million - know of a family member or close friend who has been the victim of a drinking and driving collision that they did not cause. Of those 7.5 million Canadians, 53.3% said they know one such victim, and 46.7% said they know two or more victims. Drinking and driving has a huge

impact on the lives of Canadians including serious injuries and the costs of health care, and the loss of family members and friends.

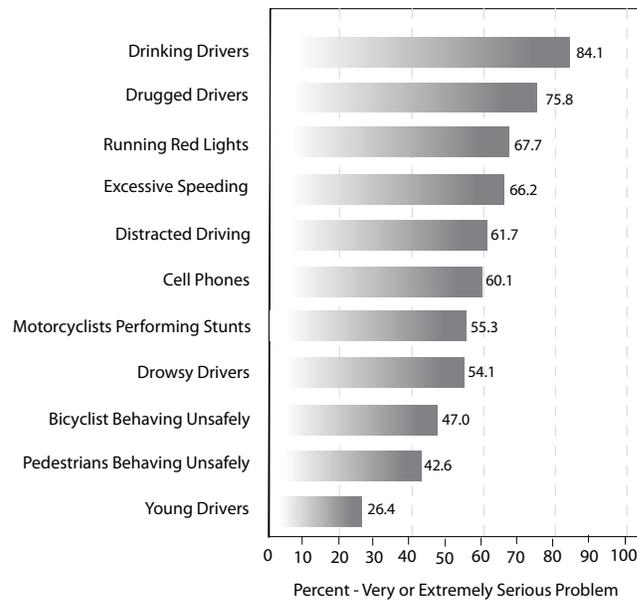
An estimated 5.4 million Canadians (16.5%) indicated that they know of a family member or friend who was drinking and driving and caused a collision where they were at fault. Of those, 66.6% said they know one person who was drinking and driving and caused a collision and the remaining 33.4% said they know two or more such people. Note that Canadians were asked only about family members or close friends, so these numbers likely underestimate the problem. There is a great deal of stigma associated with being the perpetrator of a drinking and driving accident which can have a very large impact on the lives of not only those involved in the accident, but the people who are close to them as well. Those who know someone who is about to drink and drive are in a position to prevent the people they care about from getting behind the wheel after drinking.

**Where does the issue of drinking and driving sit on the public agenda?** Canadians consistently regard drinking and driving as a priority concern. More Canadians are concerned about drinking and driving than about any other societal issue: 79.8% indicate they are very or extremely concerned about drinking and driving. Given the high annual toll on the roads due to drinking and driving and the number of people who are affected by it, this concern seems justified. The next highest level of concern was for the price of gas (69.7%) and the lowest level of concern was for airline safety (35.9%). Compared to previous years there has been little change in the percentage of those who are very or extremely concerned about drinking and driving. This is not surprising given the lack of progress in the fight against drinking and driving in recent years.

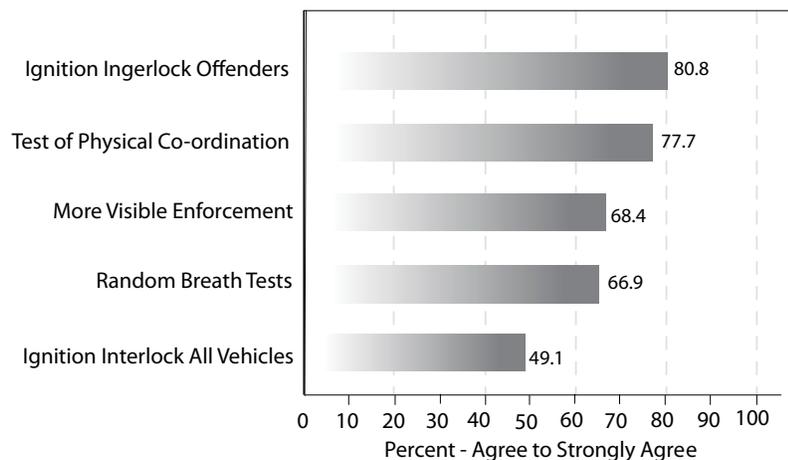


**Is drinking and driving a major road safety issue for Canadians?** Of all the road safety issues, drinking drivers were rated as a very or extremely serious problem by 84.1% of Canadians – the highest of all road safety issues. This is not surprising given that about one third of fatalities are alcohol related, and the

consequences of such crashes are substantial. The next highest road safety issue rated as a very or extremely serious problem was for drugged drivers (75.8%), and the lowest rating of concern was for young drivers (26.4%).



**Level of support for various measures.** Canadians show strong support for a variety of measures to detect and prevent drinking and driving. The figure below shows that 80.8% of Canadians agreed or strongly agreed that it should be mandatory for convicted impaired drivers to have an ignition interlock system. In 2007, the percentage was 82.8%. Over three quarters of Canadians (77.7%) think that drivers should be required to submit to tests of physical coordination if suspected of being under the influence of alcohol or drugs. This percentage was exactly the same in 2007. Incidentally, with Bill C-2 new legislation was passed making such tests possible. For the first time ever in 2008 Canadians rated their support for the following measures: 68.4% agreed or strongly agreed that there should be more visible police enforcement for drinking drivers; 66.9% agreed or strongly agreed that the police should be allowed to do random breath tests to detect drinking drivers; and almost half of Canadians (49.1%) think that an ignition interlock system should be mandatory for *all* vehicles.



Canadians who agreed that an ignition interlock system should be mandatory for **all** vehicles (49.1%) were also asked how much money they would be willing to pay to have such a device installed in their car. On average the majority would be willing to pay between \$125 and \$160 for an ignition interlock system. Although some Canadians indicated they would not want to pay anything for such a device, 3.2% said they would pay as high as \$1000.00 to have an ignition interlock installed in their car.

Although the public is more supportive of mandatory ignition interlocks for convicted impaired drivers than for mandatory ignition interlocks for **all** vehicles, almost half of all Canadians think they should be mandatory for all vehicles. However, these devices are typically used as an alternative form of punishment for drinking driving offenders and the current technology needs to become more unobtrusive to be suitable for use in all vehicles.