

TRAFFIC INJURY RESEARCH

FOUNDATION



## THE ROAD SAFETY MONITOR 2010

### DRINKING AND DRIVING IN CANADA



The knowledge source for safe driving

# THE TRAFFIC INJURY RESEARCH FOUNDATION

The mission of the Traffic Injury Research Foundation (TIRF) is to reduce traffic-related deaths and injuries. TIRF is a national, independent, charitable road safety institute. Since its inception in 1964, TIRF has become internationally recognized for its accomplishments in a wide range of subject areas related to identifying the causes of road crashes and developing programs and policies to address them effectively.

## Authors

Ward G.M. Vanlaar

Robyn D. Robertson

Traffic Injury Research Foundation

171 Nepean Street, Suite 200

Ottawa, Ontario K2P 0B4

Ph: (613) 238-5235

Fax: (613) 238-5292

Email: [tirf@tirf.ca](mailto:tirf@tirf.ca)

Website: [www.tirf.ca](http://www.tirf.ca)

December 2010

Traffic Injury Research Foundation

Copyright © 2010

ISBN: 978-1-926857-12-1

## FINANCIAL SUPPORT PROVIDED BY:

## PRIMARY SPONSORS:



Transport  
Canada

Transports  
Canada

Brewers Association  
of Canada



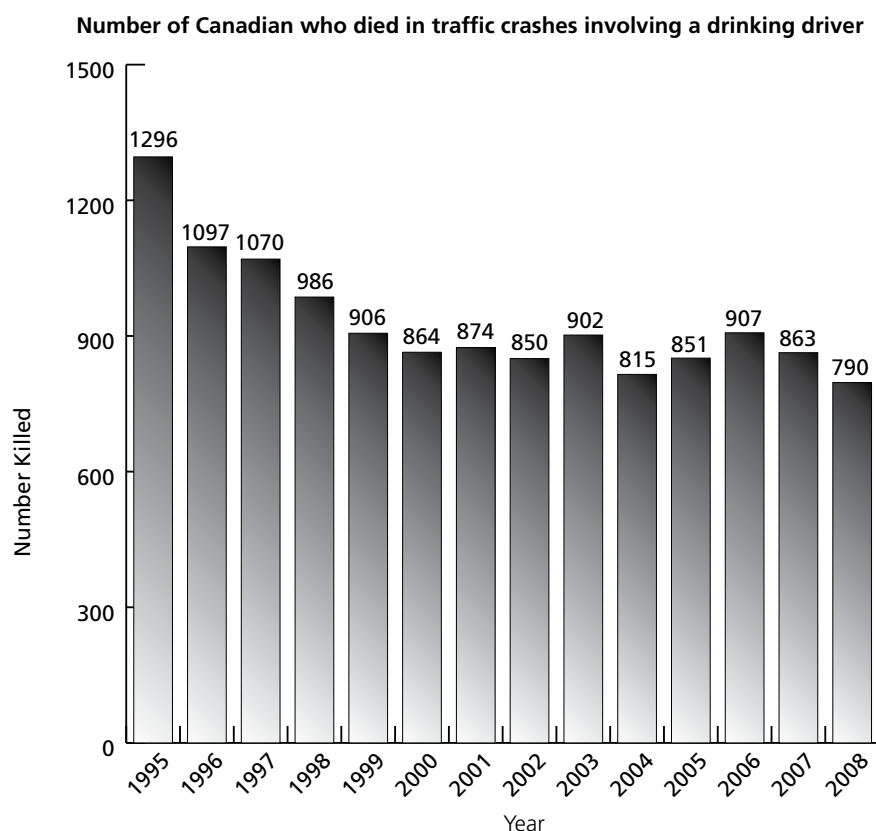
L'Association des  
brasseurs du Canada



# DRINKING AND DRIVING IN CANADA

This fact sheet summarizes national results from The Road Safety Monitor (RSM), 2010 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 the Brewers Association of Canada and Transport Canada. The survey takes the pulse of the nation on key road safety issues by means of a telephone and on-line 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.

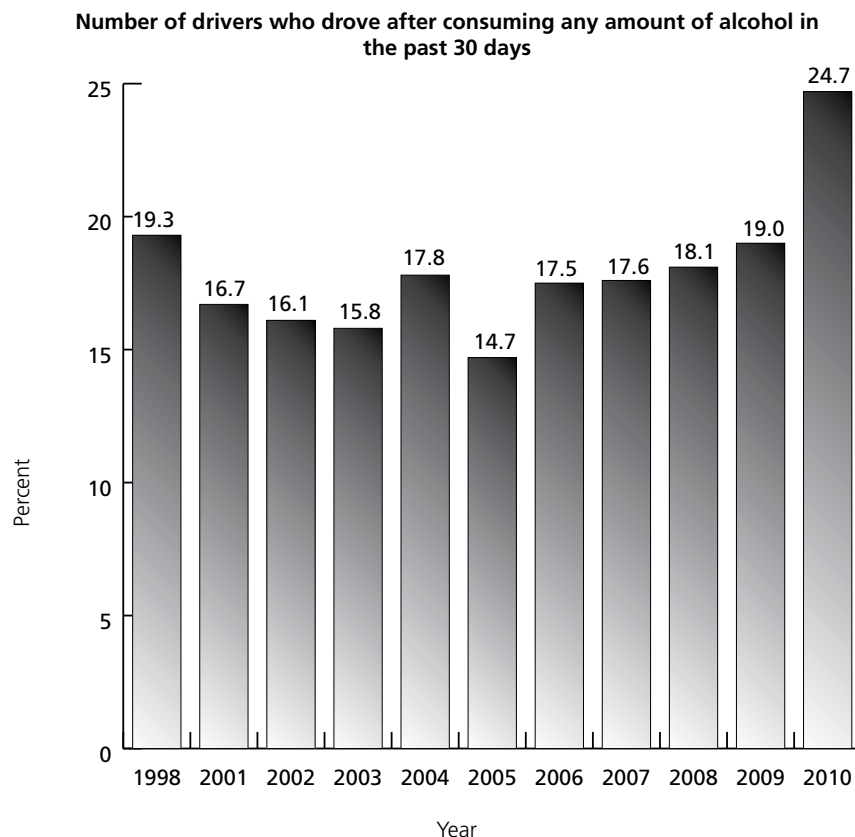
**How many Canadians die in traffic crashes involving a drinking driver?** In 2008, the most recent year for which data are available, 790 Canadians were killed in a traffic crash involving a drinking driver. This represents a continued and consistent decrease since 2006 and is below the 2004 number, the lowest count from 1995 through 2007. It appears a decreasing trend in fatalities may be emerging toward the end of the first decade of the new millennium; this will have to be further monitored.



Source: STRID, Mayhew et al., 2010

**Is the percentage of drinking drivers increasing?** When asked about driving after consuming any amount of alcohol in the past 30 days, 24.7% of Canadians admitted to doing this in 2010. This represents a consistent increase since 2005. Before 2006, this percent had decreased from 19.3% in 1998 to 14.7% in 2005. This consistent increase during the last five years suggests there has been a stable upward trend

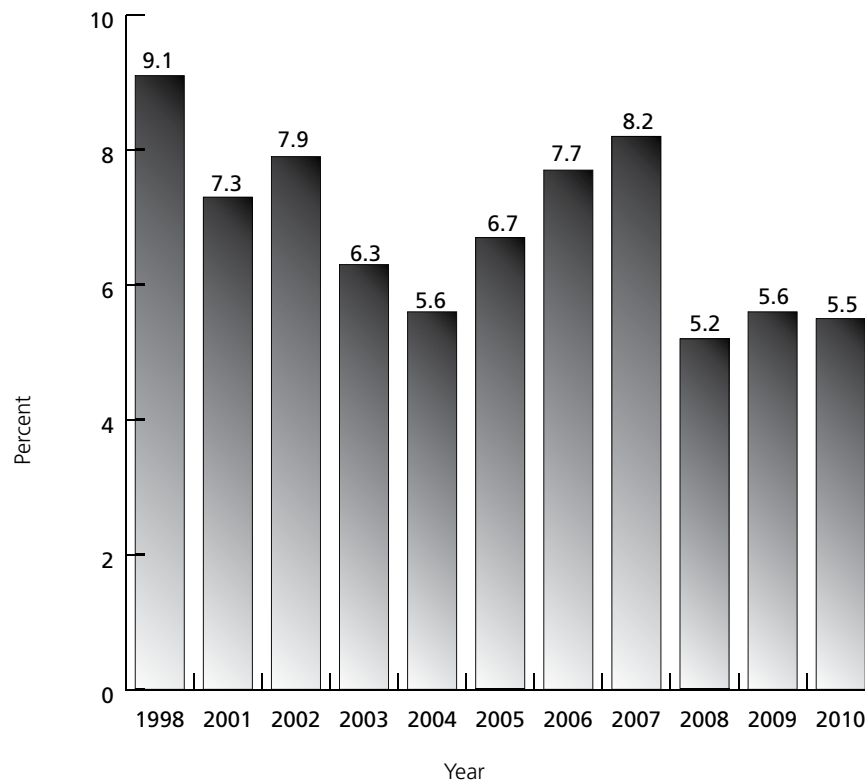
in the number of people who admit to this behaviour — it warrants mentioning that this includes drinking and driving after consuming lower levels of alcohol and levels below the legal limit or administrative limits (where they exist).



Note: 1998 data include only drivers 18 years and over

When asked about driving when they thought they were over the legal limit in the past 12 months, 5.5% of Canadians admitted to doing this in 2010. This represents a slight increase compared to 2008 when the percent was 5.2% and a slight decrease compared to 2009 when the percent was 5.6%. The 2009 and 2010 percentages do appear to confirm the considerable drop from 8.2% in 2007 to 5.2% in 2008. It has previously been suggested this decrease to 5.2% could perhaps be explained by the passage of Bill C-2 in 2008 (this new law was announced in July 2008), designed to strengthen drunk driving legislation as well as the media attention these amendments received. In light of this possible explanation, a small increase (in this case from 5.2% in 2008 to 5.6% in 2009 and 5.5% in 2010) is not surprising given that the effect of any legislation can dissipate somewhat after its introduction due to lower awareness among the public about it (e.g., because media attention disappears after a while or because enforcement efforts decrease).

**Drivers who drove when they thought they were over the legal limit**



Note: 1998 data include only drivers 18 years and over

Taken together, the results about self-reported levels of drinking and driving in combination with the continued decrease in the number of fatalities suggest the number of people who are drinking and driving at higher — i.e., more dangerous — levels of alcohol consumption is decreasing. It appears that a portion of the population of drinking drivers continue to drink and drive but no longer at higher, more dangerous levels. This would explain the lower percent of drinking drivers who think they are over the legal limit as well as the higher percent of drinking drivers who drove after consuming any amount of alcohol, including lower amounts and amounts under the legal limit. This would also help explain the drop in fatalities in 2008 — note that some argue a drop in fatalities can also be partially explained by the impact of the economic recession. While last year's data only warranted speculation, this considerable drop in fatalities according to the 2008 data do serve as corroborating evidence to bolster the hypothesis that drinking drivers continue to drink but at lower levels, notably levels below the legal limit. These possible trends that may be emerging will have to be further monitored.

**Do people who drink consider alternative solutions to driving?** Respondents were asked if they ever decided to use an alternative solution to driving when they had been drinking. Possible answers included public transport; taxi; ask someone else to drive; and wait a couple of hours until they were sober. Only 14% answered they ever considered public transport; 19% considered taking a taxi; 48% asked someone else to drive; and 30% answered they waited a few hours. Clearly, alternative solutions seem to work for the majority of people who drink. Such information could be useful to convince occasional drinking drivers to also consider alternatives.

**Do Canadians speak up to stop drivers who had too much to drink?** Respondents were asked if they ever asked a person not to drive because they thought that person had drunk too much. A clear majority (66.7%) said they have. Of those who answered they had never asked someone else not to drive, about 71% said it was because they had never been in a situation with someone who was about to drive after drinking. In other words, excluding those who had never been in such a situation, the percent of Canadians who speak up to stop potential drinking drivers was 87%. This means the norm in Canada is for people to speak up when someone may be driving after drinking.

**How many Canadians have been a passenger in a vehicle driven by someone who has been drinking?** Within the last month, 5.9% of Canadians (corresponding to an estimated 2 million people<sup>1</sup>) indicated that they had been a passenger on one occasion in a motor vehicle driven by someone who has been drinking, and 6.3% (corresponding to an estimated 2.1 million) indicated that they had been a passenger on two or more such occasions. These results do not differ considerably from previous results (5.1% and 6.6% in 2009 and 6.2% and 6.4% in 2008, respectively). These passengers may be putting themselves at risk because even when blood alcohol concentrations (BAC) are low, the risk of being in a crash and the seriousness of potential injuries increase substantially, especially in combination with other impairing factors such as fatigue and sleepiness. It appears that informing these passengers about the risks involved as well as the knowledge that the majority of Canadians do speak up against drinking and driving might help decrease the number of people who ride along as passengers with drinking drivers.

**How many Canadians drove with passengers when they thought they were over the legal limit?** Of all Canadian drivers who admitted to driving when they thought they were over the legal limit, 38.3% said they drove with passengers in their vehicle. While these figures are not directly comparable to the results from the previous question, they do confirm that people willingly — albeit perhaps not knowingly — expose themselves to the risks involved with drinking and driving. This finding also speaks to the importance of educating the public, specifically about the dangers of being a passenger in a vehicle driven by a driver who is over the legal limit.

**How many Canadians are affected by drinking and driving?** Almost one fifth (19.4%) of Canadians — an estimated 6.6 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. Drinking and driving has a huge impact on the lives of Canadians including serious injuries, the costs of health care, and the loss of family members and friends.

An estimated 13.4% of Canadians, corresponding to about 4.6 million people know of a family member or friend who was drinking and driving and caused a collision where they were at fault (this is lower than last year's estimate of 16.5%). Note that Canadians were asked only about family members or close friends, so these numbers likely underestimate the problem.

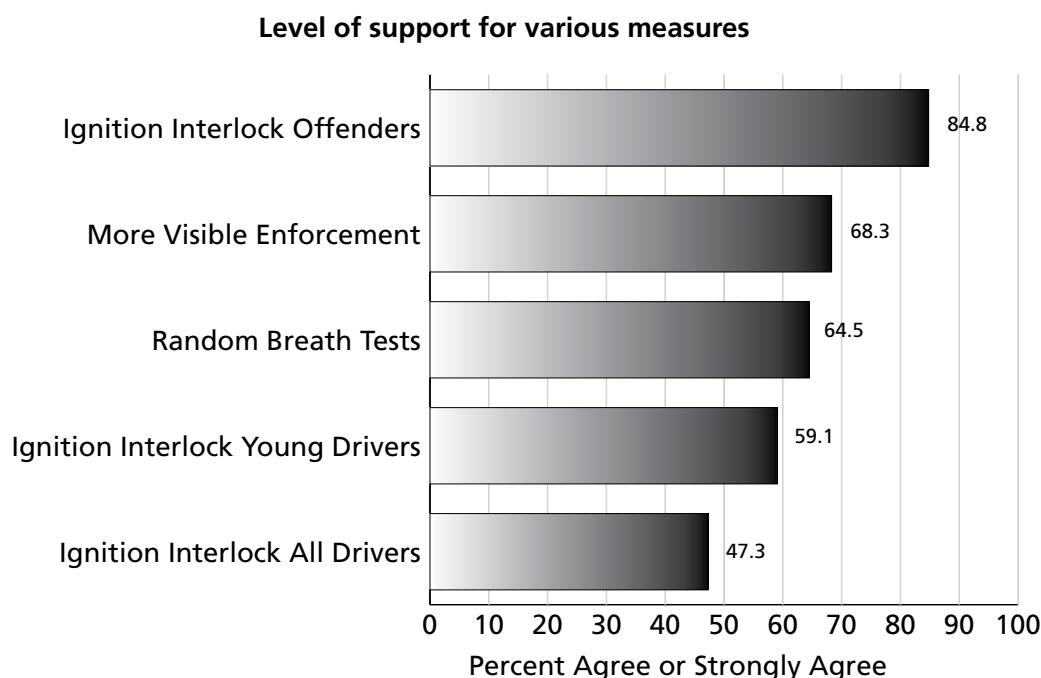
---

<sup>1</sup> This estimate is based on a total population of 34,108,752 (Statistics Canada's July 2010 estimate; source: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/>).



**Where does the issue of drinking and driving sit on the public agenda?** Canadians continue to consistently regard drinking and driving as a priority concern. More Canadians are concerned about drinking and driving than about any other societal issue: 77.2% indicate they are very or extremely concerned about drinking and driving. Like last year, the next highest level of concern was for road safety (67.7%). When comparing drinking and driving to other road safety issues (rather than societal issues), drinking drivers were rated as a very or extremely serious problem by 84.4% of Canadians (compared to 83.4% in 2009 and 84.1% in 2008). While Canadians clearly continue to express great concern about this issue, this year, for the first time ever, drinking and driving is no longer at the top of the list. The issue that most Canadians express concern about in 2010 is texting while driving with 91.3% rating this as a very or extremely serious problem. Of interest, a recent poll by the Canadian Automobile Association (CAA) also found that texting while driving has risen to the top of Canadians' road safety concerns.

**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 84.8% of Canadians agreed or strongly agreed that it should be mandatory for convicted impaired drivers to have an alcohol ignition interlock system. In 2007, the percentage was 82.8%; in 2008 it was 80.8% and in 2009 it was 79.4%. While this number was virtually the same from 2007 through 2009, it appears to be somewhat higher in 2010. Canadians also rated their support for the following measures: 68.3% agreed or strongly agreed that there should be more visible police enforcement for drinking drivers; 64.5% agreed or strongly agreed that the police should be allowed to do random breath tests to detect drinking drivers; 59.1% think that an alcohol ignition interlock should be mandatory for young drivers; and 47.3% (compared to 49.1% in 2008 and 43.5% in 2009) think that an alcohol ignition interlock system should be mandatory for all drivers.



Although the public is more supportive of mandatory ignition interlocks for convicted impaired drivers and young drivers than of mandatory ignition interlocks for all drivers, still well over 40% of Canadians think these devices should be mandatory for all drivers. This trend may reflect a growing awareness of the safety benefits of these devices. In many jurisdictions ignition interlocks are being considered as a standard safety feature on vehicles, much like seatbelts and airbags. Efforts are underway to make the technology less obtrusive and more suitable for use in all vehicles.

**About the poll.** These results are based on the RSM, an annual public opinion poll developed and conducted by TIRF. A total of 1,201 Canadians completed the poll in September and October of 2010. 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. For the second time, some respondents were contacted by phone (401 in 2010; 600 in 2009) and some on-line (800 in 2010; 600 in 2009) as part of a gradual transition to an on-line survey.