

T R A F F I C I N J U R Y R E S E A R C H

F O U N D A T I O N



THE ROAD SAFETY MONITOR 2011

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.

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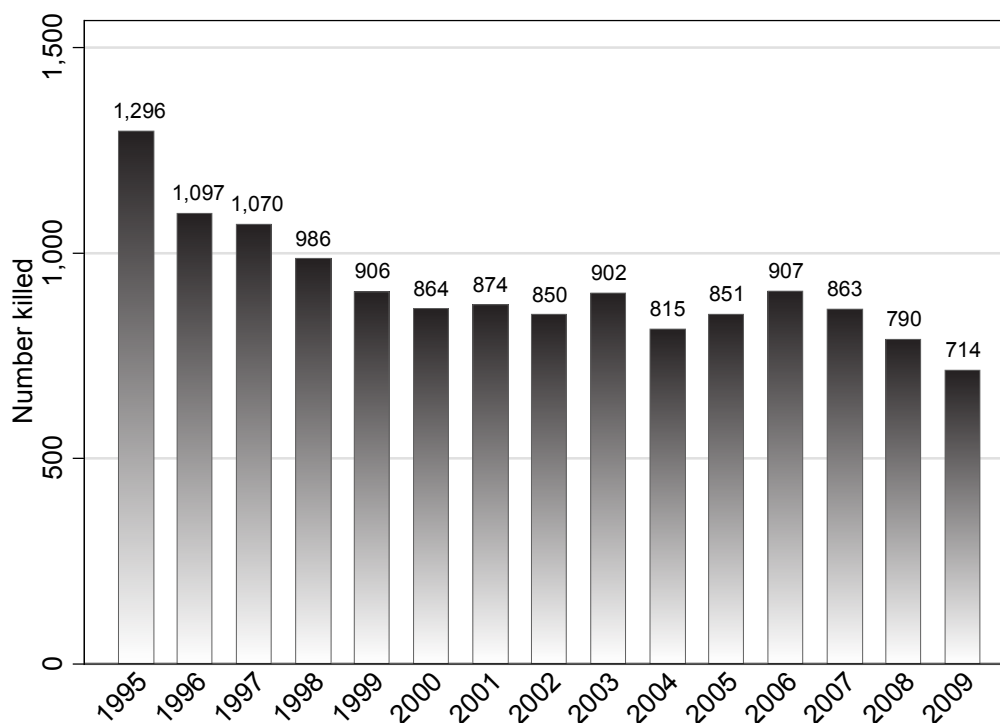
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DRINKING AND DRIVING IN CANADA

This fact sheet summarizes national results from The Road Safety Monitor (RSM), 2011 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 2009, the most recent year for which data are available, 714 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 (815), the lowest count from 1995 through 2007. It appears a decreasing trend in fatalities is emerging toward the end of the first decade of the new millennium; this will have to be further monitored.

Number of Canadians who have died in traffic crashes involving a drinking driver

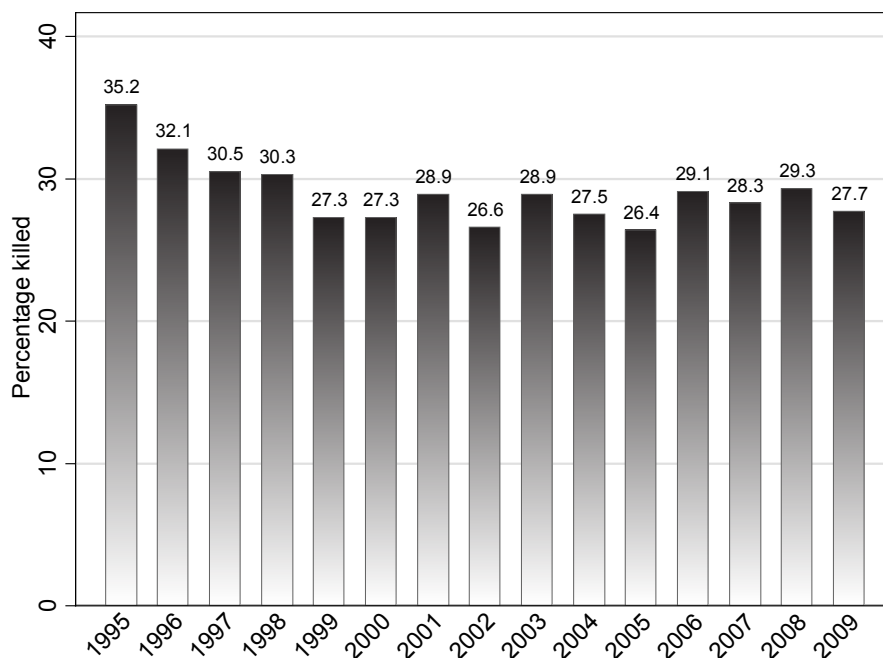


Source: Mayhew et al. 2011

What percentage of Canadians die in traffic crashes involving a drinking driver? When looking at the percentage of persons killed in a traffic crash in Canada involving a drinking driver out of all persons killed in traffic crashes in that year, in 2009, 27.7% of fatal crashes involved a drinking driver.

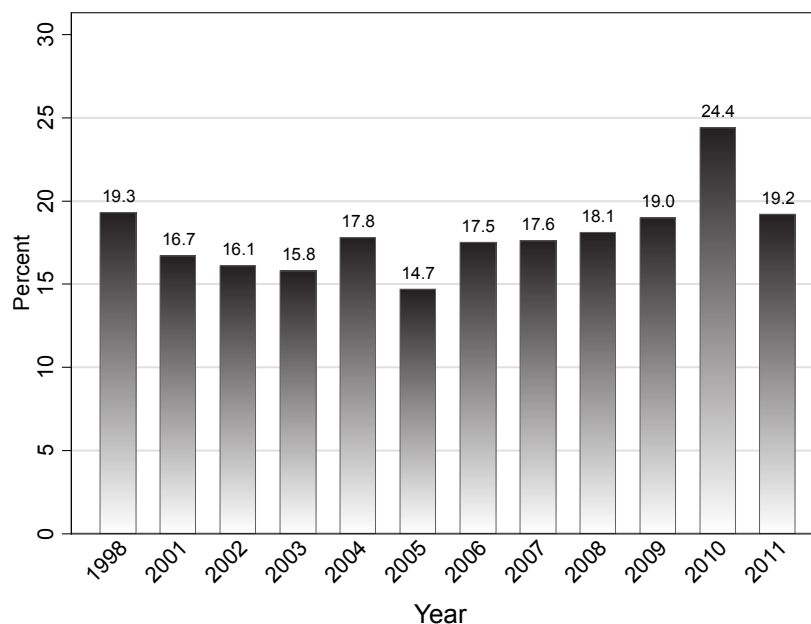
This percentage has decreased from a high of 35.2% in 1995 and has been fairly consistent since 1999 remaining below 30%.

Percentage of Canadians who died in traffic crashes involving a drinking driver



Is the percentage of drinking drivers increasing? When asked about driving after consuming any amount of alcohol in the past 30 days, 19.2% of Canadians admitted to doing this in 2011. Before 2006, this percent had decreased from 19.3% in 1998 to 14.7% in 2005. The percentage then slightly increased between 2006 and 2009 and jumped to 24.4% in 2010. The drop to 19.2% in 2011 suggests that the

Percentage of drinking drivers

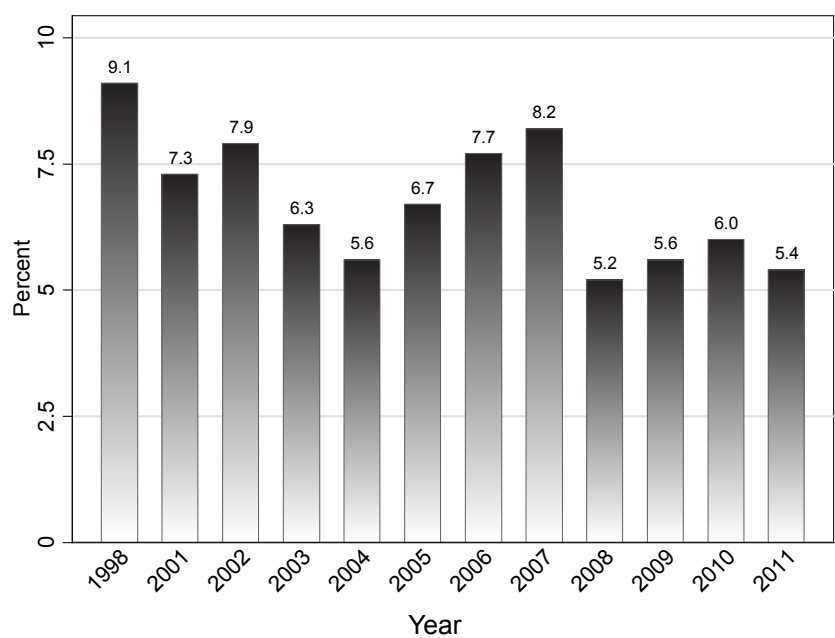


Note: 1998 data include only drivers 18 years and over

apparent increase in 2010 was an anomaly. 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).

When asked about driving when they thought they were over the legal limit in the past 12 months, 5.4% of Canadians admitted to doing this in 2011. This represents a slight non-significant decrease compared to 2010 when the percent was 6.0%. Of importance, the percentages from 2008 to 2011 do appear to confirm the considerable drop from 8.2% in 2007 to 5.2% in 2008. This significant decrease to 5.2% in 2008 could perhaps be explained by the passage of Bill C-2 (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 6.0% 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). Note that the difference between 2007 and every subsequent year is significant, so both the consistency in the trend itself as well as significance tests suggest a decrease in drivers admitting to driving while they thought they were over the legal limit in the past 12 months.

Percentage who drove when they thought they were over the legal limit



There has been a continued and consistent decrease in the number of fatalities involving a drinking driver in Canada. This decreasing trend is also still apparent when considering the percentage of persons killed in a traffic crash in Canada involving a drinking driver, although it is much less pronounced. Self-report data further show that the percentage of those who reported driving after they thought they were over the

legal limit has also declined. More data are needed to further monitor these trends and to confirm whether the situation is indeed improving or not.

How many Canadians have been a passenger in a vehicle driven by someone who has been drinking?

Within the last month, 6.8% of Canadians (corresponding to an estimated 2.4 million people¹) indicated that they had been a passenger on one occasion in a motor vehicle driven by someone who has been drinking, and 6.7% (corresponding to an estimated 2.3 million) indicated that they had been a passenger on two or more such occasions. These results do not differ considerably from previous results (6.6% and 6.8% in 2010, 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 increases, especially in combination with other impairing factors such as fatigue and sleepiness.

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, 42.4% said they drove with passengers in their vehicle (40.1% in 2010). 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.

Where do drivers do most of their drinking? In 2011, 38.8% (35.0% in 2010) 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; 16.6% (28.3% in 2010) report doing most of their drinking at a bar; 14.7% (15.3% in 2010) report doing most of their drinking in a restaurant; 13.0% (10.1% in 2010) report doing most of their drinking in their own home; 3.7% (7.0% in 2010) report doing most of their drinking at a party; and 13.2% (4.4% in 2010) report doing most of their drinking at other locations. 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 the designated driver for someone who has been drinking?

Canadians were also asked within the last month, how many times, if at all, they have been the designated driver for someone who has been drinking. In the past 30 days, 11.0% indicated that they have been the designated driver for someone who has been drinking on one occasion and 16.1% on two or more occasions.

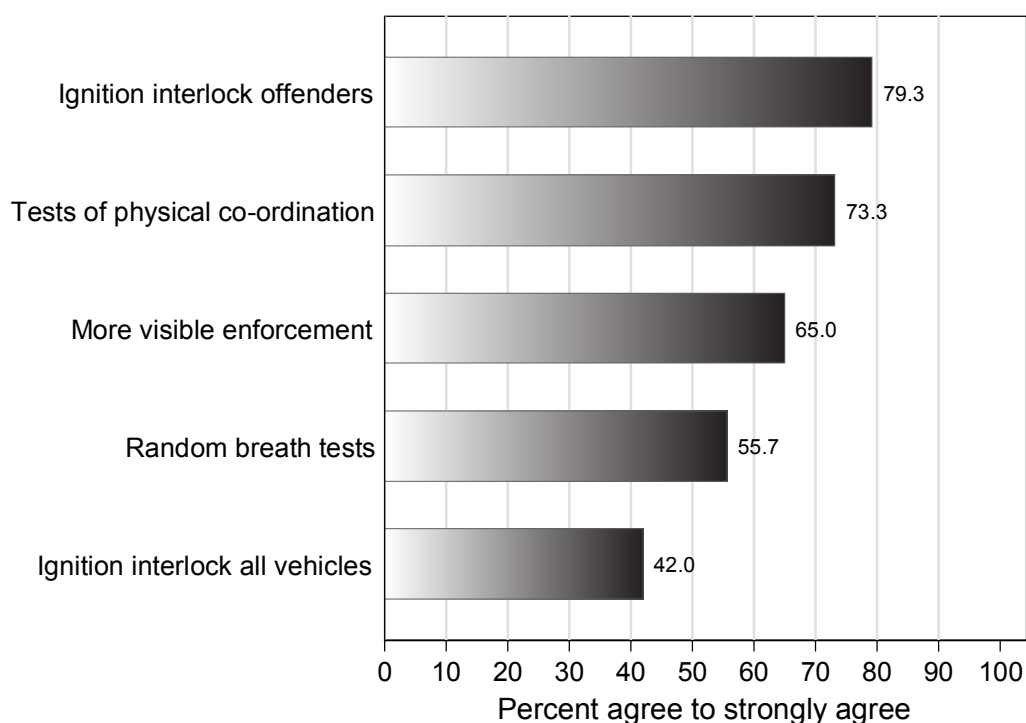
Where does the issue of drinking and driving sit on the public agenda? Canadians continue to regard drinking and driving as a priority concern. However the percentage has decreased slightly from 81.8% in 2006, reaching a low of 69.3% in 2011. When compared to other societal issues such as crime

¹ This estimate is based on a total population of 34,482,779 (Statistics Canada's July 2011 estimate; source: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/>).

and global warming, drinking and driving has consistently been at the top of the list of societal concerns. However, in 2011 for the first time ever drinking and driving was not at the top of the list as the price of gas at the pumps was rated as a slightly bigger concern at 69.7% compared to 69.3% for drinking and driving. However, this difference is not significant. 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 80.9% of Canadians (compared to 83.0% in 2010 and 83.4% in 2009). While Canadians clearly continue to express great concern about this issue, in 2011, for the second year in a row, drinking and driving was not at the top of the list. The issue that most Canadians expressed concern about in 2011 was texting while driving with 85.1% rating this as a very or extremely serious problem. Of interest, a 2011 and 2010 poll by the Canadian Automobile Association (CAA) also found that texting while driving has risen to the top of Canadians' road safety concerns for the second year in a row.

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 79.3% of Canadians agreed or strongly agreed that it should be mandatory for convicted impaired drivers to have an alcohol ignition interlock system in 2011. Canadians also rated their support for the following measures: 73.3% agreed or strongly agreed that drivers should be required to submit to tests of physical coordination if suspected of being under the influence of alcohol or drugs; 65.0% agreed or strongly agreed that there should be more visible police enforcement for drinking drivers; 55.7% agreed or strongly agreed that the police should be allowed to do random breath tests to detect drinking drivers; and 42.0% (compared to 43.5% in 2009 and 46.0% in 2010) think that an alcohol ignition interlock system should be mandatory for all drivers.

Level of support for various measures



Although the public is more supportive of mandatory ignition interlocks for convicted impaired drivers (79.3%) than of mandatory ignition interlocks for all drivers (42.0%), still 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 several 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 1,208 Canadians completed the poll in September and October of 2011. Results can be considered accurate within plus or minus 2.8%, 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 third time, some respondents were contacted by phone (303 in 2011; 401 in 2010; 600 in 2009) and some on-line (905 in 2011; 800 in 2010; 600 in 2009). Note that some of the 2010 results reported here are different from those in the 2010 RSM on Drinking and Driving as more accurate weights for the 2010 data year that were made available after this previous report was released were used in this fact sheet.