



THE ROAD SAFETY MONITOR 2009
DRINKING AND DRIVING IN CANADA

TIRF

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.

About the poll

These results are based on the RSM, an annual public opinion poll developed and conducted by TIRF. A total of 1,200 Canadians completed the poll in September and October of 2009. 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 first time, half of all respondents were contacted by phone and the other half on-line as part of a gradual transition to a complete on-line survey.

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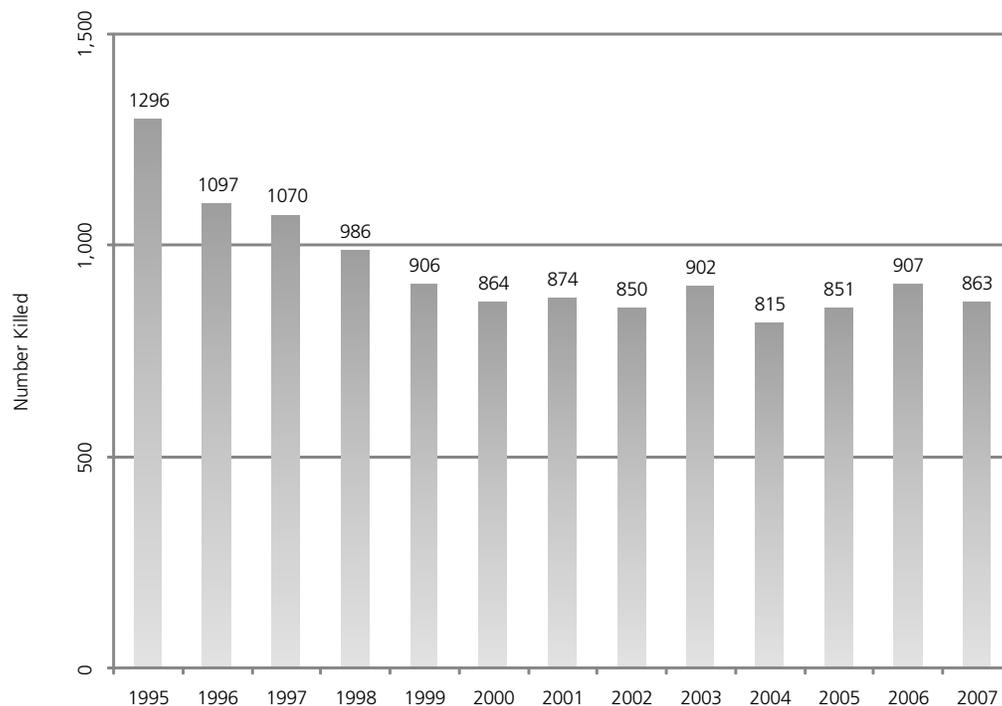
DRINKING AND DRIVING IN CANADA

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DRINKING AND DRIVING IN CANADA

This fact sheet summarizes national results from The Road Safety Monitor (RSM), 2009 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, the Canadian Trucking Alliance 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.

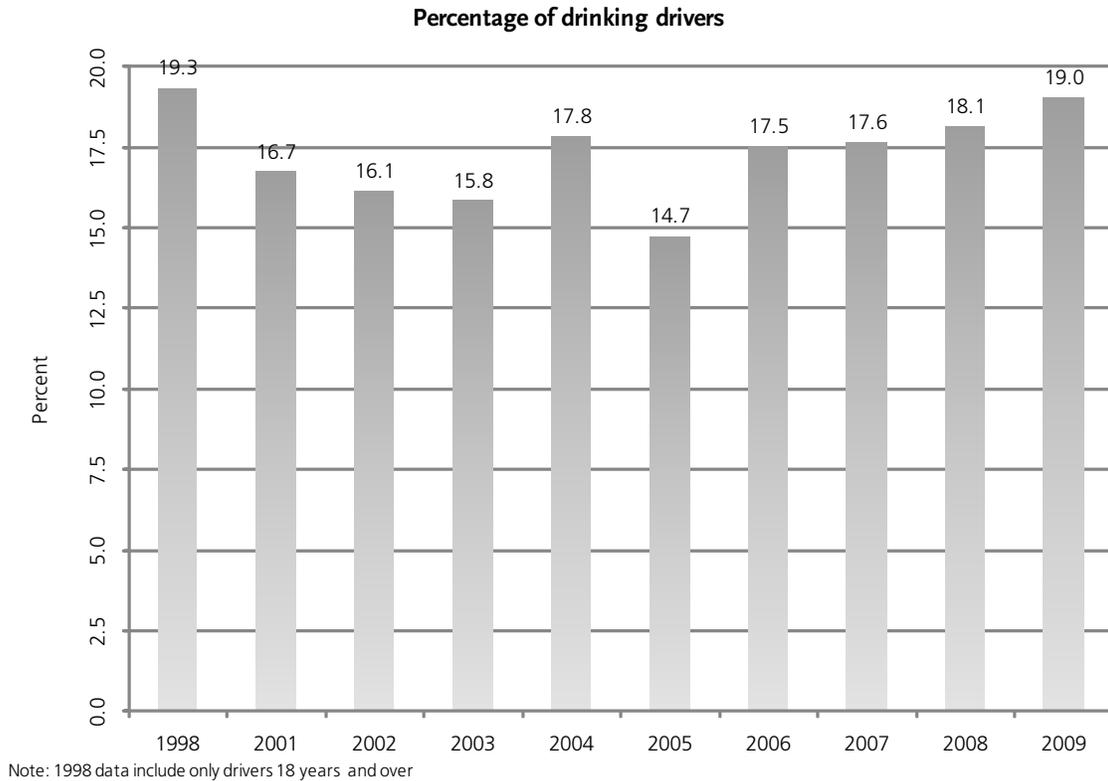
How many Canadians die in traffic crashes involving a drinking driver? In 2007, the most recent year for which data are available, 863 Canadians were killed in a traffic crash involving a drinking driver. This represents an increase since 2004 (the year with the lowest count ever) although compared to the 908 people killed in 2006, the 2007 number has decreased. There have been steady declines from 1,296 in 1995 to 815 in 2004 (with the exception of the year 2003) but it is evident that much of the substantial decrease through to 2004 occurred during the 1990s. Since 2000 progress has been slower and not as consistent. While the 2005 and 2006 data suggest that progress has halted, the 2007 data may be indicative of a new downward trend in fatalities. More data in future years will have to be collected to further monitor this.



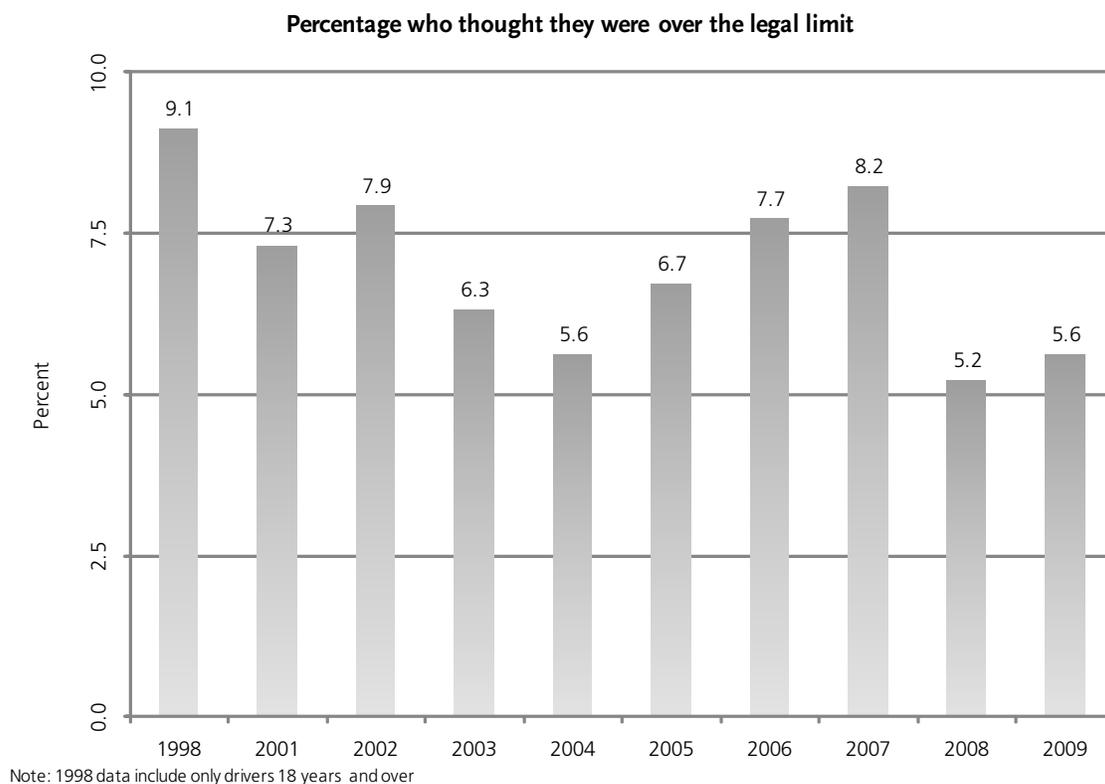
Source: Mayhew et al. (in press)

Is the percentage of drinking drivers increasing? When asked about driving after consuming any amount of alcohol in the past 30 days, 19% of Canadians admitted to doing this in 2009. This represents a consistent increase from 2005 to 2009. Before 2006, this percent had decreased from 19.3% in 1998

to 14.7% in 2005. This consistent increase during the last four 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 limit (where they exist).



When asked about driving when they thought they were over the legal limit in the past 12 months, 5.6% of Canadians admitted to doing this in 2009. This represents a slight increase compared to 2008 when the percent was 5.2%. However, the 2009 percent does appear to confirm the considerable drop from 8.2% in 2007 to 5.2% in 2008. It has previously been suggested that last year's decrease to 5.2% could perhaps be explained by the passage of Bill C-2 in 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) is not surprising given that the effect of any legislation can dissipate somewhat after its introduction due to lowered salience among the public about it (e.g., because media attention disappears after a while or because enforcement efforts decrease).



Taken together, the results about self-reported levels of drinking and driving in combination with the decreased 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. One hypothesis is that a portion of the population of drinking drivers has begun to drink less when driving; they are still drinking and driving, but no longer at higher, more dangerous levels. This would explain the lower percent of drinking drivers over the legal limit as well as the higher percent of drinking drivers who drove after consuming any amount of alcohol, including lower amounts as well as amounts under the legal limit. This would also explain a drop in fatalities. It warrants mentioning that this hypothesis cannot be tested with the available data and, as such, it is speculative. If such a pattern would continue to be apparent in future years, this would raise the credibility of this hypothesis. In particular, logic dictates that the considerable drop in the percent of self-reported drinking and driving over the legal limit from 8.2% in 2007 to 5.2% in 2008 and 5.6% in 2009 would be reflected in the 2008 and 2009 number of alcohol related fatalities. This will have to be monitored.

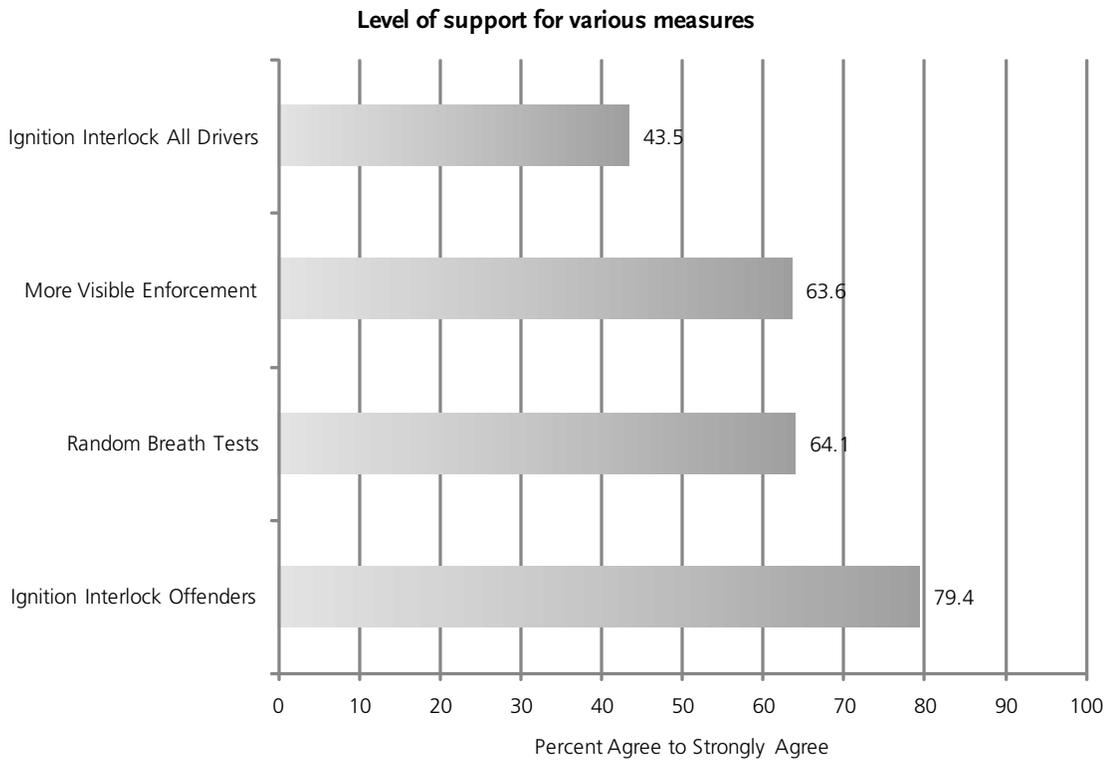
How many Canadians have been a passenger in a vehicle driven by someone who has been drinking? Within the last month, 5.1% of Canadians (corresponding to 1.7 million people) indicated that they had been a passenger in a motor vehicle driven by someone who has been drinking on one occasion, and 6.6% (corresponding to 2.2 million) indicated that they had been a passenger on two or more such occasions. These results do not differ considerably from last year's results (6.2% and 6.4% respectively). 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 fifth (19.8%) of Canadians — an estimated 6.7 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. While this estimate differs somewhat from last year's estimate (22.3% corresponding to an estimated 7.5 million) it is clear that drinking and driving continues to have 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 16.5% of Canadians, corresponding to about 5.6 million people know of a family member or friend who was drinking and driving and caused a collision where they were at fault. Of interest, this percent has not changed compared to last year. 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 crash, which can have a very large impact on the lives of not only those involved in the crash, 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. Comparable to last year, only a minority of drinking drivers are potentially drinking by themselves at home, which means that many of them are in the midst of friends or family who can take action to influence behaviour and prevent the problem.

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: 79.2% indicate they are very or extremely concerned about drinking and driving. Of considerable interest, the next highest level of concern was for road safety (61.2%), while last year the next highest concern was for the price of gas. The price of gas is now only ranked fifth at 54.7%. 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 83.4% of Canadians (compared to 84.1% in 2008) — the highest of all road safety issues. 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.

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 79.4% 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% and in 2008 it was 80.8% — virtually the same over the past three years. Canadians also rated their support for the following measures: 64.1% (66.9% in 2008) agreed or strongly agreed that the police should be allowed to do random breath tests to detect drinking drivers; 63.6% (68.4% in 2008) agreed or strongly agreed that there should be more visible police enforcement for drinking drivers; and 43.5% (compared to 49.1% in 2008) 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 than mandatory ignition interlocks for all drivers, and although the 2009 percent is lower than the 2008 one, still well over 40% of Canadians think these devices should be mandatory for all drivers. This trend reflects 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.