

National Transportation Safety Board Targets Impaired Driving

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Industry professionals should remain aware of trends in policy and technology that may lead to changes in our nation's laws to combat drunk driving. On January 13, 2016, **National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB)** Chairman Christopher Hart announced the "2016 Most Wanted Safety Improvements," a comprehensive set of transportation safety goals that the NTSB will advocate in the year ahead. One priority is to "end substance abuse in transportation."^[i] The NTSB is a federal agency charged with investigating serious transportation accidents. While it is not a policymaking body, its recommendations carry significant weight with members of US Congress, state legislators and law enforcement personnel.

While enormous progress has been achieved in reducing drunk driving deaths in the US since the 1980s, the absolute number of fatalities resulting from drunk driving accidents has hovered around 10,000 over the last three years. The cost of deaths and injuries is estimated at \$37 billion annually by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.^[ii] These figures are in part the result of an increase in miles traveled by a growing American population, an improved economy and lower gas prices. Nevertheless, the human and economic toll is substantial.

A key recommendation on the NTSB's "Most Wanted" list is adoption of new state definitions of drunk driving covering with a blood alcohol content (BAC) of 0.05 or lower. The current federally-mandated BAC standard is 0.08. The NTSB also urges pursuit of technologies to make vehicles safer, which includes development of vehicles that cannot be operated by an impaired driver. Substantial federally-funded research is devoted to a variety of technologies to immobilize vehicles and to track consumption by individuals with prior drunk driving offenses.

Many practical solutions offered by industry members contributed to the long-term reduction in drunk driving and changes in social norms. Examples include practical programs, such as encouraging use of designated drivers and providing safe rides for customers.

[i] See, <http://www.nts.gov/safety/mwl/Pages/mwl8-2016.aspx>

[ii] See, <http://www.nhtsa.gov/Impaired>.

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