Impact of Safety Campaigns on Reducing Drunk Driving

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For decades, state agencies and local communities have initiated mass media campaigns to promote public health and reduce drunk driving and alcohol-related accidents. Keeping the public aware is essential because according to the NHTSA (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration), on average, 28 individuals in America lose their lives each day to alcohol-related crashes at the rate of one every 51 minutes. With more than 13,000 lives lost every year in the U.S., eliminating dangerous behavior behind the wheel can make traveling safer for everyone sharing the road.

In 1983, the NHTSA launched its “Friends Don’t Lead Friends Drive Drunk” campaign in an effort to prevent alcohol-impaired friends and family members from driving after drinking. Fifteen years later in 1998, the U.S. Department of Transportation reported that the nation had its lowest number of roadway accident fatalities involving alcohol since the government agency gathering statistics. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has continually sponsored this highly successful campaign along with others including their “Drinking and Driving Can Kill a Friendship” public safety announcement.

Surveys show that seven out of every ten Americans at some point since the campaign was initially launched have attempted to stop another person from driving after drinking. The agency’s newest campaign “Probably Okay Isn’t Okay” asks the viewer to assess how they look for obvious and not so obvious indicators of impairment on themselves and others when deciding to get behind the wheel.

These campaigns have been highly successful at impacting the choices we make after drinking. Research as shown that more people than ever are catching a ride, calling a taxi, or using public transportation to avoid driving after drinking.

Illinois Drunk Driving Safety Campaigns

In recent years, the state of Illinois developed, implemented and promoted their own public safety announcements and campaigns involving drunk driving, including their “Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over” campaign. In addition to providing the public much-needed information, the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) started an educational campaign informing drivers of the legal and safety consequences related to drinking and driving.

The drunk driving safety project was initiated to “save lives and prevent injuries” and prevent the need for law enforcement to keep the road safe. It was during this time that the Illinois state legislature also enacted numerous alcohol-related laws including the 0.08 law and the graduated licensing law that called on law enforcement officers to ticket drivers who were not obeying the law. The campaign included conducting roadside safety checks to catch drunk drivers and saturation plans involving state and local police departments to be in full force during this five-week period leading up to Labor Day.
The campaign initiated prior to Labor Day began on August 1, 2015, and ran through September 7, 2015. More than 150 local law enforcement agencies across Illinois actively participated in the five-week event. Multiple IDOT-sponsored media events were held in six cities including Chicago, DuQuion, East Moline, Peoria, Rockford, and Springfield just before the successful Labor Day campaign was launched.

**Media Events**

The campaign included more than 70 print stories, 8 television news stories, and 15 radio stories along with 53 public announcements. The promotional campaign involved displayed banners, distributed flyers and posters and numerous presentations. The public was made aware through Internet announcements, public access messages and nearly 300 issued press releases.

**Law Enforcement Events**

To enforce the drunk driving laws of the State of Illinois, law enforcement conducted more than 70 roadside safety checks and ensured that law enforcement was in full force in the days leading up to Labor Day. Officers wrote an average of one citation every 38.5 hours during this time frame and issued 368 driving under the influence and alcohol-related citations. More than 6000 other citations were issued during the campaign involving violations of child passenger safety seat and safety belt laws.

**Telephone Surveys**

The Illinois Department of Transportation conducted a telephone survey to understand the perceptions of the public involving alcohol-related drunk driving law enforcement. Approximately one out of every three respondents providing answers in a telephonic survey in September 2015 stated that they had “seen or heard [some] thing about the police setting up roadway safety checks where they stopped and checked drivers and vehicles.”

Between April and September 2015, telephone survey results revealed that the public (statewide 60.4 percent) had become more aware of the state’s “Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over” slogan. However, in the Chicago metropolitan area, that number rose significantly from “56.4 percent in April to 71.0 percent in September.”

**Necessity of the Campaign**

The IDOT safety campaign was based on well-documented census literature (2011 Fatality Analysis Reporting System) gathered by the NHTSA that links drunk driving to fatalities. The census data reported that “the severity of a motor vehicle crash increases when the driver is impaired. Individuals who drive while impaired are more likely to drive recklessly and become involved in fatal crashes. Plus, impaired drivers are less likely to use safety belts, thereby increasing their own risk for serious injuries in a crash.”

In an effort to prevent fatal crashes, the state’s Department of Transportation began issuing press releases in the last week of August 2015 that ran through September 3, 2015. These releases were issued to make the public aware that their local law enforcement agency would be out in full force to catch drunk drivers on the road during the Labor Day holiday weekend. The program also involved paid media, where the state paid more than $700,000 to run advertisements on cable channels, mobile platforms, and broadcast television.

**The Survey Results Drinking and Driving Behaviors**

To better understand how much the public became more aware of the problems associated with drunk driving, the telephonic survey conducted by the Illinois DOT focused on “behaviors related to drinking and driving” to determine the respondents’ frequency of drinking, drinking and driving, how often they drove after drinking, and the number of drinks they consumed on their last occasion. Some questions asked during the telephone survey included:

- **How often did the respondent drink alcohol in the past month?** - Throughout all of Illinois, nearly half (45.9 percent) stated that they had consumed at least one alcoholic beverage in September that could include liquor, wine, or beer in the last 30 days. This number was slightly lower than the telephone survey taken in June that showed the 46.4 percent of respondents admitted to drinking a beverage within the last 30 days.

- **Has the respondent ever operated a motor vehicle within two hours after consuming alcohol [within the last 30 days]?** - Nearly 22 percent or more than one in five responded that they had operated a motor vehicle within two hours after alcohol. Out of all the respondents, 2.5 percent said they did not know if they had ever driven a car within two hours after drinking alcoholic beverages.

- **Within the last month how many times as the respondent operated a motor vehicle within two hours after
consuming alcohol? – Of the number of respondents (22 percent) who admitted to driving within two hours after drinking alcohol, six out of ten (49 percent of those) admitted to driving within two hours after drinking in the last 30 days.

- How many alcoholic beverages did the respondent consume on the last occasion? – Most of the respondents (43.7 percent) stated that they had had “one” drink. That was followed by the next largest group of respondents (38.3 percent) stating they had two drinks. Only 4.4 percent of the telephone respondents claimed to have consumed five or more alcoholic beverages on the last occasion that they drove a vehicle after drinking.

The telephonic survey asked the respondents the frequency that they operated a motor vehicle after consuming too much alcohol. The question hoped the uncover to how many times the average driver participating in the survey thought they were too drunk to drive. Approximately 4 percent of the respondents thought at some point their life they had thought they had too much to drink and still drove.

Roadside Safety Checks

Respondents and the telephonic survey were asked about their experience and level of awareness involving roadside safety checks when law enforcement officers were stopping traffic to check to see if drivers’ capabilities were impaired.

- Roadside Safety Checked Awareness – Approximately 29 percent of the respondents of the telephonic survey stated that over the course of the last month they saw or heard something “about the police setting up roadside safety checks where they stopped to checked drivers and vehicles.”

- How They Became Aware – The group that responded that they were aware of the roadside safety checks being conducted at a local level was then asked how they saw or heard the information. Approximately 34 percent of the respondents indicated that they were made aware by relatives or friends. Another 32 percent said they heard about the roadside safety checks on the radio and/or television, while another 17.3 percent reported “seeing or hearing about the checks be the newspaper.” Less than one out of every five (18.6 percent) respondents said that they became aware from another source.

Stopped at a Roadside Check

The state survey hoped to determine the number of responders in the telephonic survey who had “personally seen a roadside check” to understand how many had “personally been through a roadside check in the past 30 days” either as a passenger in the vehicle or as the driver.

Out of all the September responders involved in the survey, 54.1 percent “reported having been through a check.” Out of the total number of individuals who had personally gone through a roadside check in the previous month, 54.4 percent of those had gone to the check in the Chicago area.

Safety Slogan Awareness

Finally, the surveyors asked the respondents if they were aware of certain safety slogans involving drunk driving. The results included “You Drink and Drive. You Lose” (70.6 percent), “Click It or Ticket” (92 percent), “Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over” (60.4 percent), “Friends Don’t Let Friends Drive Drunk” (77.8 percent), “Buckle up America” (47 percent), “Police in Illinois Arrest Drunk Drivers” (46.4 percent), and “Driving. Over the Limit. Under Arrest” (25.1 percent).

Creating Awareness through Social Media

The Illinois Department of Transportation asked respondents taking their survey about social media to reach young drivers concerning the issues of alcohol impaired driving, texting while driving and using seatbelts. More than four out of five (80.8 percent) stated that they visited Facebook and more than half (52.5 percent) had visited YouTube within the last seven days. This was followed by Snapchat (16.5 percent), Pinterest (20.9 percent), and Instagram (23.4 percent).

The respondents were asked to give an opinion on the best solution for reaching young drivers. More than half (50.5 percent) who gave their response suggested social media would work best at accomplishing the goal. Another 19.6 percent thought traditional safety campaigns by advertising and television, newspaper, signage, and billboards were effective for targeting a young population. Other respondents thought an educational campaign would be the most effective solution for reaching young adults and teenagers at high school and college. Only a small percentage (5.6 percent) thought measures taken by law enforcement could help.
Other Deterrent Strategies

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers various deterrent strategies to reduce or prevent drunk driving. The suggestions recommended by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration have also been proven to be highly effective. Both federal agencies recognize that state and local authorities must utilize various resources to implement the following recommendations to ensure their success. These include:

- **Improved Drunk Driving Laws** - Currently, laws on the books concerning drunk driving make it illegal for any individual to operate a motor vehicle with a blood alcohol content level at or above 0.08 percent. However, the CDC recommends that individuals under 21 years of age must follow “zero-tolerance” laws that make it illegal for any underage driver to operate a motor vehicle with “any measurable amount” of alcohol in their bloodstream.

- **Ignition Interlocks** - Installing ignition interlocks in motor vehicles can be an effective solution from starting the engine if the driver is legally drunk with a measurable blood alcohol content above a specified level, like 0.02 percent. This equipment measures the driver’s alcohol content through their breath. Typically, some individuals who have been repeatedly convicted of DUI can continue driving but only by using an ignition interlock. The CDC recommends mandating this equipment for all drunk driving offenders. This would include those that have been convicted of drunk driving only once.

- **License Suspension and Revocation Laws** - The CDC recommends enhancing license suspension and revocation laws through an administrative process. These changes in the law would help the police force to take away the driver's license if a blood alcohol test registers the legal BAC limit or higher. Revoking or suspending a license would be automatic for any individual who refuses to take a breath test or blood test. However, every state could individually choose the length of time to suspend the license; although, license suspensions lasting 90 days or longer seems to be the most effective.

- **Educational Instruction Programs** - Instructional programs conducted in schools are highly effective at teaching teenagers to never ride with any driver who is intoxicated. However, the CDC states that not enough studies have been done to show that these programs are effective at reducing drunk driving and alcohol-related accidents.

- **Alcohol Screening** - The CDC suggests that “teachable moments” involving brief interventions and alcohol screening are effective solutions for identifying individuals who are a high risk for developing alcohol problems. These methods can ensure that individuals in need receive treatment when necessary. Interventions and screenings are best delivered in a healthcare setting to assist the individual in changing their behavior of driving while impaired.

Prevention

The most effective solution to stop driving while intoxicated is to prevent the problem from occurring at all. Mothers Against Drunk Driving ((MADD) has released tips on how to promote safe driving, especially for those who fall into the highest demographic of drunk drivers, between 21 and 44 years of age. These tips include:

- **Designated Driver** - Before going anywhere including the neighbor’s house to spend time with friends, family or others, choose a designated driver who has made a commitment to not drinking at that time when others are consuming alcohol. Having a designated sober driver can ensure that everyone in the car gets home safely.

- **Drink Responsibly** - Being a responsible drinker who consumes moderate amounts of alcohol usually doesn’t have to worry about impaired judgment or distorting their vision and hearing.

- **Ask for a Ride** - If you are coherent enough, but recognize are too drunk to drive, ask for a ride. If those in your party are not willing to help you find another method to get home than to drive yourself, take the initiative and ask others, call the taxi or Uber vehicle, or don’t leave until someone else gives you a ride.

- **Protect People Who Are Intoxicated** - The safety campaign on drunk driving awareness suggests that “Friends Don’t Let Other Friends Drive Drunk”. The safety campaign recommends taking away the keys of an intoxicated friend, family member, guest or patron if they want to operate their vehicle after consuming alcohol. While the intoxicated person might get mad, the alternatives of dying, being injured or causing the death of others are significantly worse. Consider organizing carpools to prevent those known to drink excessively any way to drive themselves after the party or event.

- **Be a Responsible Host** - Whenever throwing a party be sure to serve an abundance of food, never allow minors to drink alcohol, arrange alternate forms of transportation including designated drivers, taxicabs,
and Uber rides to ensure your guests will get home safely. Make sure there is an abundance of non-alcoholic beverages including coffee, soda, juice, and water to provide alternative options for individuals who do not want to consume alcohol or have had enough.

- **Look Out for Drunk Drivers** – There are certain indicators that an individual is driving drunk on the roadway. Avoiding the dangerous and erratic behavior can help prevent a drunk driving accident. The most common indicators of a drunk driver include those who are:
  - Continually making wide turns
  - Driving extremely slow
  - Drifting, swerving, or weaving in and out of traffic
  - Driving down the center lane of the road
  - Coming to a complete stop without any cause
  - Driving on the wrong side of the street
  - Continuously or erratically braking
  - Nearly missing other vehicles and objects
  - Making illegal or abrupt turns
  - Making slow responses to changing traffic signals
  - Failing to use headlights when driving the dark

- **Enhance your Parenting Skills** – Family and friends should never condone any form of underage drinking and most never served alcoholic beverages to minors. In addition, develop an effective curfew plan for your child and let them know you will be waiting up when they arrive home after a night out. Tell your young driver you expect to be called to pick them up if for any reason they do not have a ride home. Recognize that your child is going to mimic your actions, good or bad – so never drink and drive.

All humans are social creatures, which makes it particularly difficult in a social setting when every other individual in the group is drinking heavily. Studies have shown that individuals who agree to be a designated driver for the group usually agree to do that reluctantly. However, for the sake of everyone’s health and well-being along, it is important to remember the drinking and driving is a serious crime especially if the unacceptable behavior results in an accident with injuries or fatality.

Federal and State safety awareness campaigns involving drunk driving reminds us all that if caught driving while impaired we will be asked to take a field sobriety test or chemical test to determine our level of intoxication. By enforcing stricter DUI laws, government agencies hope to deter the motoring public from getting behind the wheel if they have consumed too much alcohol or taken illicit drugs.

**Sources:**

- [https://www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/pdf/impaired_driving/drunk_driving_in_il.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/pdf/impaired_driving/drunk_driving_in_il.pdf)

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