

Health and Wellness News

DUI Trends Point to More Drugged Driving

DUI Not Limited To Alcohol

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DUI studies have shown an alarming trend in traffic fatalities related to driving under the influence of **drugs**, not alcohol.

"While the incidence of **drunk driving violations** has been on a decline, **DUI** while drugged is on the rise," comments Mary Rieser, Executive Director of The Atlanta Recovery Center, Narconon Drug Rehab. "**DUI** while taking **prescription meds** or illegal drugs causes impaired judgement and decreased motor skills. **Drug abuse** and drug addiction cause untold misery in families, jobs, the court systems, and in the open road. Be careful."

In 2006, an estimated 13.3 percent of persons age 12 and older drove under the **influence of an illicit drug or alcohol** at least once in the past year. This percentage has dropped since 2005, when it was 14.1 percent. The 2006 estimate corresponds to 32.8 million persons.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reports that more than 17,000 people were killed in alcohol-related crashes in 2006. Studies also have found that drugs are used by 10 to 22 percent of drivers involved in crashes, often in combination with alcohol.

According to the 2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, an estimated 10.2 million people age 12 and older reported DUI, or driving under the influence, of illicit drugs during the year prior to being surveyed. This corresponds to 4.2 percent of the population age 12 and older, similar to the rate in 2005 (4.3 percent), but lower than the rate in 2002 (4.7 percent). In 2006, the rate was highest among young adults age 18 to 25 (13.0 percent).

A number of studies have examined illicit drug use in drivers involved in motor vehicle crashes, reckless driving, or fatal accidents while **DUI**. For example:

One study found that about 34 percent of motor vehicle crash victims admitted to a Maryland trauma center tested positive for "drugs only"; about 16 percent tested positive for "alcohol only."

Approximately 9.9 percent (or 1 in 10) tested positive for alcohol and drugs, and within this group, 50 percent were younger than age 18.

Driving under the influence of an illicit drug or alcohol was associated with age. In 2006, an estimated 7.3 percent of youth age 16 drove DUI. This percentage steadily increased with age to reach a peak of 31.8 percent among young adults age 22. Beyond the age of 22, these rates showed a general decline with increasing age.

Studies conducted in several localities have found that approximately 4 to 14 percent of drivers who sustained injury or died in traffic accidents tested positive for THC, the active ingredient in marijuana.

The principal concern regarding drugged driving is that driving under the influence of any drug that acts on the brain could impair one's motor skills, reaction time, and judgment. Drugged driving is a public health concern because it puts not only the driver at risk, but also passengers and others who share the road.

"Don't let someone drive **DUI**," comments Ms. Rieser. "Get them the help they need."

Source: NIDA.gov