

Lowering the Drink- Drive Limit

Committee Stage of Road Traffic Act 1988 (Alcohol Limits) (Amendment) Bill, House of Lords

On Friday 11th March 2016 the Committee Stage will be held of Lord Brooke of Alverthorpe's Private Members' Bill to amend the Road Traffic Act 1988.ⁱ This would **lower the prescribed limit of alcohol in relation to driving or being in charge of a vehicle.**

The purpose of the legal limit on a driver's blood alcohol concentration (BAC) is to reduce death and injury on the roads. It is well evidenced that the risk of road traffic collision and injury **increases rapidly** with alcohol consumption.

A **lowering** of the current drink-drive limit in England and Wales from 80mg alcohol/100ml blood to 50mg alcohol/100ml blood or lower would **improve road safety and save lives.**

The limit in Scotland was lowered from 80mg alcohol/100ml blood to 50mg alcohol/100ml blood in December 2014. The Northern Ireland Assembly Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill is awaiting Royal Assent.ⁱⁱ It will lower the limit to 20mg for learner, novice and professional drivers and to 50mg for other drivers. This is likely to be implemented in 2016.

Key points:

- Latest confirmed figures show that in 2013 there were 240 deaths and 8,270 injuries in Britain in road traffic collisions involving a driver or rider over the legal drink-drive limit (80mg). This number has remained static since 2010. Initial estimates for 2014 indicate no change.
- Measured against the BAC limits that apply in most other countries, there were approximately an additional 25 deaths involving a driver or rider over 50mg. England and Wales have the highest drink drive limit in Europe with the exception of Malta.
- Reducing the legal Blood Alcohol Concentration limit to 50mg alcohol/100ml blood would save over 25 lives and save over 95 people from serious injury. It would also reduce costs for the emergency services.
- In 2015 The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) urged the UK Government to prioritise action on drink driving.
- Better education and enforcement are essential parts of the solution to deter and detect drivers who drink above the legal limits. Cuts to roads police numbers and reductions in roadside breath-testing make this more difficult.
- A lower drink-drive limit would reinvigorate the message that drinking and driving is socially-unacceptable, as has happened in Scotland.
- There is overwhelming public support for lowering the legal drink drive limit – a recent poll showed 77% of people favoured a 50mg limitⁱⁱⁱ
- Drivers with a BAC over 80mg (the current limit) are eleven times more likely to die in a road traffic accident than those who have drunk no alcohol
- A 2015 survey found one third of drivers who drink regularly drive whilst over the limit.

The Current Legal Drink-Drive Limit

“In 2013, the number of people estimated to have been killed in drink- drive accidents in Great Britain was 240, whilst the total number of reported casualties in drink drive accidents was 8270.^{iv}”

The science is clear- there is a **direct relationship between the quantity of alcohol drunk and the ability to function safely behind the wheel**. Drivers with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) between 20mg alcohol per 100ml blood (20mg/100ml) and 50mg/100ml have at least a 3 times greater risk of dying in a crash. This risk increases to at least six times with a BAC between 50mg/100ml and 80mg/100ml, and to 11 times with a BAC between 80mg/100ml and 100mg/100ml.^v

The impact of lowering the limit

England and Wales currently have one of the highest blood alcohol limits for driving in Europe, joining Malta as the only EU countries with a legal drink-drive limit of 80mg alcohol/100ml blood. All other EU countries have a limit of 50 mg/100 ml or lower.

Lowering the drink-drive limit from 80mg alcohol/100ml of blood to 50mg/100ml of blood could save lives, as well as preventing many more serious accidents

North Report, 2010^{vi}

Scotland lowered its drink-drive limit to 50 mg alcohol/100 ml blood in December 2014. Police figures show a 12.5% decrease in drink-drive offences in the first nine months of the new, lower limit.^{vii}

Lowering the current drink-drive limit to 50mg would reduce the number of call-outs to accidents and the associated public sector costs of police, ambulances, and hospital admissions.^{viii} Given the financial pressure that these services currently face, this should be a key consideration for government.

Why the law should be changed now

The Government state that drink driving ‘remains a priority’. Drink driving is a significant and deadly problem on our roads, and lowering the limit in the interests of public safety would go a considerable way to addressing this. We strongly urge the government to consider lowering the limit as **a third of drivers that drink admit to driving when over the legal limit- the equivalent to 10 million UK adults.**^{ix}

Reducing the drink drive limit would be an effective way of avoiding substantial numbers of deaths, along with saving hundreds of millions of pounds. **The government should stop delaying and put road safety first.**

What you can do to help

- Ensure that Lord Alverthorpe is aware you support his Private Members' Bill to lower the prescribed limit of alcohol in relation to driving or being in charge of a vehicle.
- Attend Committee Stage of Road Traffic Act 1988 (Alcohol Limits) (Amendment) Bill on Friday 11th March 2016.
- Meet with the Alcohol Health Alliance to discuss drink-driving and how you can support this important policy that will improve road safety, save lives and millions of pounds.

Who supports a lower limit?

The Alcohol Health Alliance and organisations who support a lowering of the legal drink-drive limit include:

- Automobile Association
- Aftermath Support
- BRAKE
- Campaign Against Drinking & Driving (CADD)
- Chief Fire Officers Association
- Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety
- Police Federation of England and Wales
- Local Government Association
- RAC
- Road Haulage Association
- RoadPeace
- The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents
- Salvation Army
- Support & Care After Road Death & injury
- Victims of Drink Drivers

About the Alcohol Health Alliance UK (AHA)

The AHA is a group of 45 organisations whose mission is to reduce the damage caused to health by alcohol misuse. For more information, please visit www.rcp.ac/aha. For further information or to arrange a meeting with an AHA representative or please contact Laura McLeod, Policy and Advocacy Manager on lmcleod@alcoholconcern.org.uk or 0207 566 9804.

About PACTS

PACTS is an All-Party Parliamentary Group and charity which promotes transport safety. For further information see <http://www.pacts.org.uk/>

ⁱ <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2015-16/roadtrafficact1988alcohollimitsamendment.html>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/legislation/primary-legislation-current-bills/road-traffic-amendment-bill/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Alcohol Health Alliance 'National attitudes and behavior survey' December 2015

^{iv} DfT (Department for Transport) (2015). Final Estimates for reported road traffic accidents involving illegal alcohol levels: 2013. Available at : https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/451402/rrcgb-drink-drive-2013-final.pdf

^v Road Safety Observatory (9 October 2015), Drink Driving [Online]. Available: <http://www.roadsafetyobservatory.com/Review/10055>. [Last accessed 22 January 2016]

^{vi} North, P. (2010). Report of the Review of Drink and Drug Driving Law. Available at: <http://northreview.independent.gov.uk/docs/NorthReview-Report.pdf>.

^{vii} BBC News 29 May 2015 - *Drink-drive offences fall after lower limit introduced*. Available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-32940408> [Accessed 22 January 2016]

^{viii} Local Government Association media release, 9 March 2015 - *Lower the drink drive limit to cut road deaths, say Fire and Rescue Authorities* – available online at http://www.local.gov.uk/media-releases/-/journal_content/56/10180/7077779/NEWS#sthash.knPv7ZJO.haP0OGI4.dpuf [accessed 22 January 2016]

^{ix} RIAS News release Thursday, 15 October 2015 - *Over 10 million UK drivers get behind the wheel when knowingly over the limit*. Available at <http://www.rias.co.uk/about-us/news-and-press-releases/over-10-million-uk-drivers-get-behind-the-wheel-when-knowingly-over-the-limit/>