

INSURANCE INSTITUTE FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Friday, March 21, 1997

FEWER DRINKING DRIVERS ON THE ROAD BUT ALCOHOL-IMPAIRED DRIVING STILL A PROBLEM, NEW NATIONAL ROADSIDE BREATH-TEST SURVEY FINDS

ARLINGTON, VA – Fewer drivers on U.S. roads on weekend nights have been drinking, but the proportion of drivers with high blood alcohol concentrations (BACs) hasn't changed significantly since 1986. These are the major findings of a new nationwide, roadside breath-test survey sponsored by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Seventeen percent of 1996 drivers had measurable alcohol – down from 26 percent in 1986 and 36 percent in 1973. The percentage of drivers with 0.10 BACs or higher, indicating impairment under laws in all 50 states, was 2.8 percent, compared with 3.2 percent in 1986 and 5.1 percent in 1973.

More than 6,000 randomly selected drivers were interviewed and breath-tested for alcohol for the 1996 survey, conducted between 10 p.m. and 3 a.m. on Friday and Saturday nights, September 6 through November 9. Results of this survey were compared with two earlier national surveys. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration in 1973 sponsored the first national breath-test survey, and the Institute did a second survey in 1986.

Other trends noted include:

➡ Fewer motorists younger than 21 are driving with high BACs. Among this age group in 1996, just 0.3 percent had BACs 0.10 percent or higher, down from 2.7 percent in 1986 and 4.1 percent in 1973.

-- MORE --

➡ Adult drivers ages 21-34 continue to be a problem. There was no change in the last decade in the proportion of drivers in this age group with BACs higher than 0.05 or 0.10.

➡ More women are driving on weekend nights and are doing so with high BACs. The proportion of women surveyed in 1996 rose to 31 percent from 26 percent in 1986 and 18 percent in 1973. In the 1996 survey, 5.8 percent of female drivers had 0.05 or higher BACs, compared with 3.9 percent in 1986. The proportion of women among drivers with high BACs has more than doubled over the past decade, from 12 percent to 26 percent.