

Estimated number of reported drink drive accidents and casualties: Great Britain

Drink drive limits and definitions

For the purposes of these drink drive statistics, a drink drive accident is defined as being an incident on a public road in which someone is killed or injured and where one or more of the motor vehicle drivers or riders involved *either* refused to give a breath test specimen when requested to do so by the police (other than when incapable of doing so for medical reasons), *or* one of the following:

- i) failed a roadside breath test by registering over 35 micrograms of alcohol per 100 millilitres of breath
- ii) died and was subsequently found to have more than 80 milligrams of alcohol per 100 millilitres of blood.

Drink drive casualties are defined as all road users killed or injured in a drink drive accident.

Data sources

Two sources of data are used to assess the extent of drink drive accidents in Great Britain. These are:

- (i) **Coroners' data:** Information about the level of alcohol in the blood of road accident fatalities aged 16 or over who die within 12 hours of a road accident is provided by Coroners in England and Wales and by Procurators Fiscal in Scotland.
- (ii) **STATS19 breath test data:** The personal injury road accident reporting system (STATS19) provides data on injury accidents in which the driver or rider survived and was also breath tested at the roadside. If the driver or rider refused to provide a breath test specimen, then they are considered to have failed the test unless they are deemed unable to take the test for medical reasons.

Completeness of data and reliability of drink drive estimates

Both sources of data from the Police and Coroners on drink drive accidents are incomplete. In recognition of the uncertainty associated with the estimates produced from this data the numbers of accidents and casualties are rounded to the nearest 10.

In the case of the STATS19 breath test data, some drivers and riders are not breath tested since it is not always possible to administer a test to all drivers involved. Some drivers and riders not tested might have failed if a test could have been administered.

For many drivers or riders killed in road accidents, a post-mortem blood alcohol level is not available, either because the casualty died more than twelve hours after the accident, or because no test was carried out, or because some of the data are not reported to the Department by Coroners and Procurators Fiscal.

Adjustments to the reported data are required to estimate the actual number of drink drive accidents and their related casualties. The estimates published are based on a method described in the 1989 edition of *Road Accidents Great Britain* (RAGB). This method has two parts:

- a) the number of fatal accidents where a driver or rider died with an illegal alcohol level is estimated from the Coroners' and Procurators' Fiscal data.
- b) the number of accidents where a surviving driver or rider had an illegal alcohol level is an estimate based on a calculation of the proportion of these alcohol-related accidents which can be identified from the STATS19 breath test data.

Part b) was revised in 1993 in the light of research by the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL), published in TRL Report PR40 *The Actual Number of Non-Fatal Drink drive Accidents*. This provided a method which takes into account the fact that relatively more of the drivers and riders involved in fatal and serious accidents are breath-tested than in slight accidents, whereas previously a single factor had been used to allow for under-reporting for all accident severities. The revised estimates were first published in *RAGB 1992*.

Estimates for the latest year are provisional due to Coroners' data being available for analysis a year later than the main road accident data. Typically around half per cent of the data expected to be available for analysis are ultimately available for inclusion in the provisional estimates. The estimates for fatalities depend mainly on Coroners' data and are particularly susceptible to revision between the provisional and final figures.