Reported Road Casualties in Great Britain:

Estimates for accidents involving illegal alcohol levels:

2012 (provisional) and 2011 (final)

Statistical Release

1 August 2013

RESPONSIBLE STATISTICIAN:

Fay Tuddenham

FURTHER INFORMATION

Media Enquiries:
020 7944 6898
Public Enquiries:
020 7944 6595
Roadacc.stats@dft.gsi.gov.uk

Department for Transport

Reported Road Casualties in Great Britain: Estimates for accidents involving illegal alcohol levels: 2012 (provisional) and 2011 (final)

This publication presents statistics on personal injury accidents on public roads (including footways) in Great Britain, which became known to the police within 30 days.

These are **provisional statistics** on accidents reported to the police involving drinking and driving in Great Britain in 2012. The figures also include **final estimates** for 2011, revised from last year's publication as more data are now available. More detailed statistics on drink driving accidents and casualties will be available in Reported Road Casualties Great Britain - Annual Report, due for publication on 26 September 2013.

Key findings

- Provisional estimates for 2012 show that 290 people were killed in drink drive accidents in Great Britain (17 per cent of all reported road fatalities), an increase of around a quarter compared with 2011.
- There was a 5 per cent decrease in seriously injured drink drive casualties in 2012, to around 1,200 (5 per cent of all seriously injured road casualties).
- Final estimates for 2011 show that there were 220 fatal drink drive accidents in 2011, resulting in 230 deaths, the lowest number of deaths since detailed reporting began in 1979.
- Amongst those killed in drink drive accidents, the majority (68 per cent) are drivers and riders over the legal alcohol limit. The remaining 32 per cent were other road users, involved in the accident but not necessarily over the legal limit themselves.
- Since 1979, when detailed reporting began, there has been an almost six-fold reduction in the number killed in drink drive accidents and a similar drop in seriously injured casualties.

A note on the methodology used to produce these estimates can be found here: www.gov.uk/transport-statistics-notes-and-guidance-road-accident-and-safety

1. Drink drive accidents and casualties

Provisional figures for 2012

- In 2012, there were 290 fatalities resulting from drink drive accidents in Great Britain, **around 25 per cent higher than in 2011** and accounting for around **17 per cent of all reported road fatalities** in 2012.
- The number of seriously injured casualties in drink drive accidents **decreased by 5 per cent compared to 2011**, to 1,210 (5 per cent of all seriously injured casualties) and the lowest ever reported since detailed reporting began in 1979. The number of slightly injured drink drive casualties rose by 1 per cent in 2012, to 8,500.
- The total number of drink drive accidents decreased slightly in 2012, to 6,680, and corresponding to **4 per cent of all road accidents**. However, there was around a 15 per cent increase in the number of **fatal** accidents, to 250.
- The figures for 2012 are based on a limited sample of data and are **provisional** until more complete information is available in Summer 2014. For more details on the methodology and revisions, see Section 4.

Final figures for 2011

- Provisional figures for 2011 were published in August 2012. They have now been revised as final data are available. The resulting revisions were downwards – around 15 per cent reduction in the number of fatal accidents and casualties reported compared with the provisional figures and a 2 per cent reduction in seriously injured casualties.
- The final figures show that in 2011, there were **230 fatal casualties** resulting from drink drive accidents, a 4 per cent reduction compared to 2010 and the lowest ever since detailed reporting began in 1979.
- In contrast, there was a **slight rise in seriously injured casualties in 2011**, to 1,270 (a rise of 2 per cent from 2010) and in slightly injured casualties, to 8,420 (a 3 per cent rise).
- In 2011, drink drive accidents accounted for **12 per cent of all those killed on the roads** and 5 per cent of those seriously and slightly injured.

Longer term trends

- Detailed reporting on drink drive accidents and casualties began in 1979. There were 1,640 fatalities due to drink drive accidents during 1979. The figures for 2011 and 2012 are around **six times lower** than this.
- Although the total number killed on the roads has fallen over the same period, **drink drive fatalities have seen a bigger fall** – in 1979, drink drive accidents accounted for around a quarter of those killed on the roads; for the last five years, they have accounted for around 15 per cent.

- The number of seriously injured casualties in drink drive accidents has fallen by a similar factor, from 8,300 in 1979 (10 per cent of all seriously injured road casualties) to 1,210 in 2012 (5 per cent). The **total** number of drink drive casualties has seen a three-fold reduction since 1979.
- Although the provisional figures suggest an increase in 2012, compared with 2011, the number of drink drive fatalities is still **around 25 per cent lower than in 2009** and almost **40 per cent lower than the 2005 – 2009 average**. The number of seriously injured drink drive casualties for 2012 is around 30 per cent lower than the 2005 to 2009 average.

Table 1 (web table ras51001): Estimated numbers of reported drink drive accidents and casualties: Great Britain 1979 – 2011 (final); 2012 (provisional);

	Accidents				Casualties			
Year	Fatal	Serious	Slight	Total	Killed	Serious	Slight	Total
1979	1,380	5,630	12,460	19,470	1,640	8,300	21,490	31,430
1980	1,280	5,430	11,860	18,570	1,450	7,970	20,420	29,830
1981	1,200	4,940	10,900	17,040	1,420	7,370	19,160	27,950
1982	1,300	5,420	12,070	18,800	1,550	8,010	20,660	30,220
1983	950	4,750	11,430	17,130	1,110	6,800	18,610	26,520
1984	1,000	4,790	11,540	17,320	1,170	6,820	19,410	27,390
1985	900	4,900	11,460	17,260	1,040	6,810	19,380	27,220
1986	850	4,590	11,510	16,940	990	6,440	19,220	26,650
1987	780	4,220	10,560	15,560	900	5,900	17,670	24,470
1988	680	3,660	10,190	14,520	790	5,100	16,860	22,740
1989	700	3,390	10,300	14,390	810	4,790	16,620	22,220
1990	650	2,910	9,650	13,210	760	4,090	15,550	20,400
1991	570	2,590	8,530	11,690	660	3,610	13,610	17,880
1992	540	2,360	7,890	10,790	660	3,280	12,770	16,710
1993	460	1,870	7,160	9,480	540	2,660	11,780	14,980
1994	470	2,090	7,330	9,900	540	2,840	11,780	15,160
1995	460	2,140	7,590	10,180	540	3,000	12,450	16,000
1996	480	2,150	8,240	10,870	580	3,010	13,450	17,040
1997	470	2,140	8,100	10,710	550	2,940	13,310	16,800
1998	410	1,860	7,840	10,100	460	2,520	12,610	15,580
1999	400	1,850	8,800	11,050	460	2,470	13,980	16,910
2000	450	1,950	9,410	11,800	530	2,540	14,990	18,060
2001	470	2,020	9,780	12,270	530	2,700	15,550	18,780
2002	480	2,050	10,620	13,150	550	2,790	16,760	20,100
2003	500	1,970	9,930	12,400	580	2,590	15,820	18,990
2004	520	1,790	8,900	11,210	580	2,340	14,060	16,980
2005	470	1,550	8,060	10,080	550	2,090	12,760	15,400
2006	490	1,480	7,430	9,400	560	1,970	11,850	14,370
2007	370	1,400	7,520	9,290	410	1,760	11,850	14,020
2008	350	1,280	6,980	8,620	400	1,620	10,970	12,990
2009	340	1,180	6,530	8,050	380	1,500	10,150	12,030
2010	220	990	5,420	6,620	240	1,240	8,210	9,690
2011	220	1,040	5,430	6,690	230	1,270	8,420	9,920
2012 [P]	*250*	*960*	*5,460*	*6,680*	*290*	*1,210*	*8,500*	*10,000*

Source: STATS19, Coroners and Procurators Fiscal

[P] Provisional data. The sample of fatality data from Coroners for 2012 has not been finalised and as such, the estimates for 2012 are provisional. For examples of the revisions seen previously when finalising provisional figures, see Section 4.
Estimates are rounded to the nearest 10 to reflect the uncertainty in making estimates from incomplete data sources. See methodology note for more details :
www.gov.uk/transport-statistics-notes-and-guidance-road-accident-and-safety

Chart RAS51001a: Estimated number of casualties killed in reported drink drive accidents: Great Britain 2000 – 2011 (final); 2012 (provisional).

Pale blue ticks show previous provisional estimates for each year 2000 to 2011.
Grey ticks for 2012 show the 95 per cent confidence interval for the provisional estimate[1].

Source: STATS19, Coroners and Procurators Fiscal

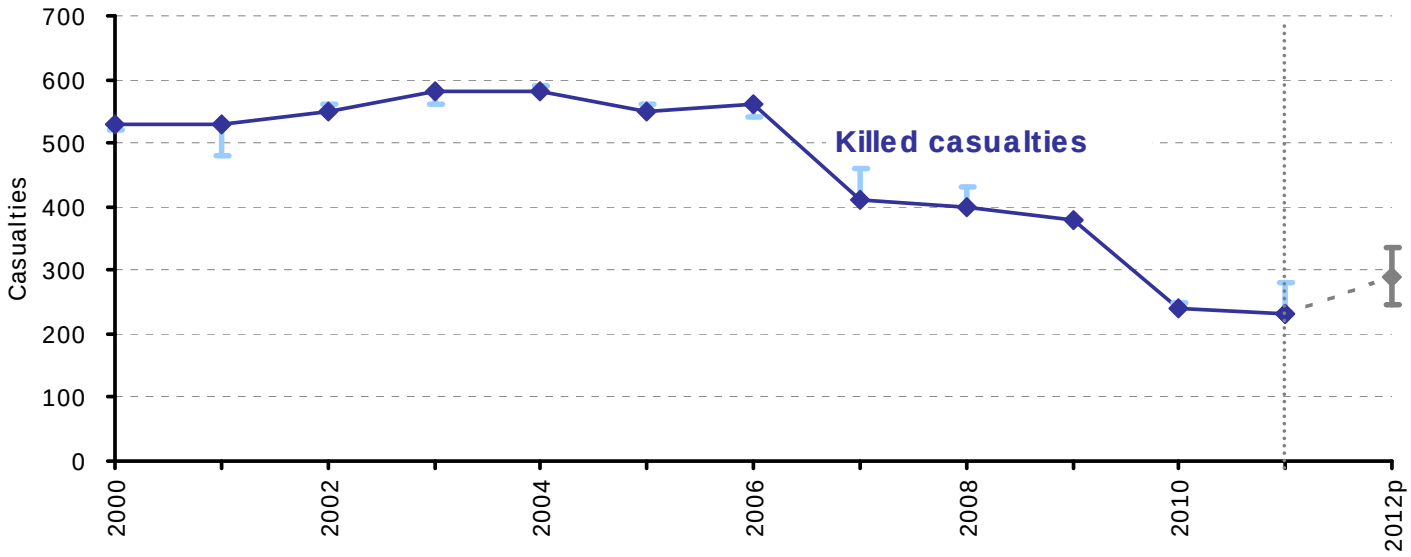
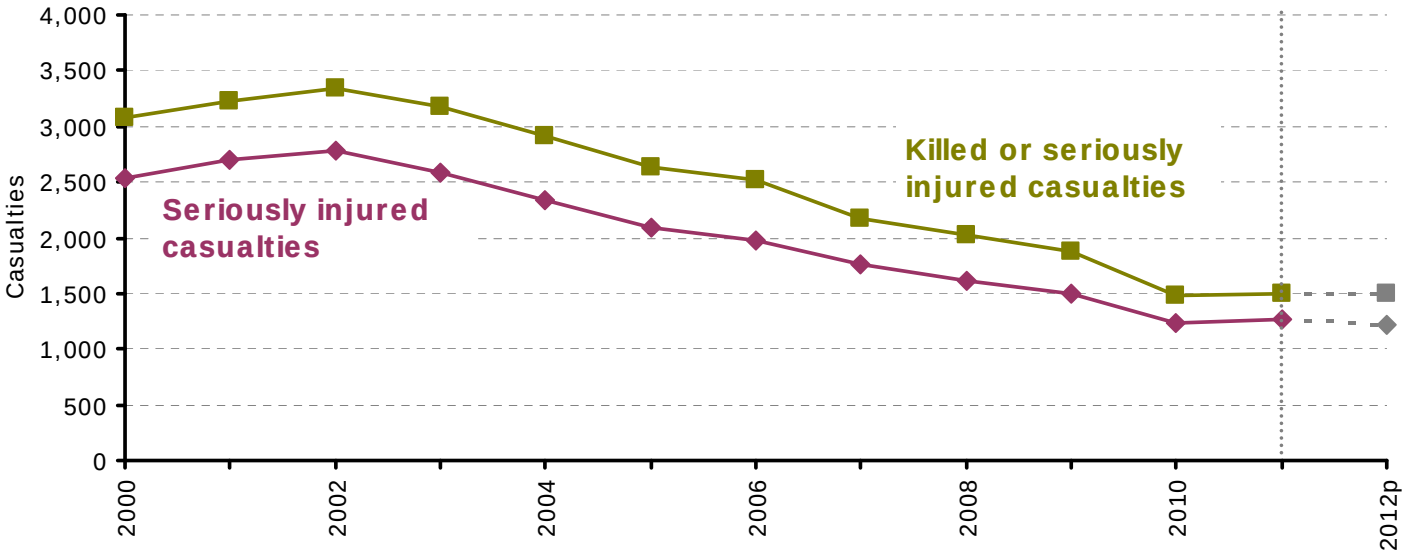


Chart RAS51001b: Estimated number of casualties killed or seriously injured in reported drink drive accidents: Great Britain 2000 – 2011 (final); 2012 (provisional).



Source: STATS19, Coroners and Procurators Fiscal

[1] The 95 per cent confidence interval for 2012 provisional estimate is calculated assuming the sample of available data is randomly distributed, although in practice it may be exposed to bias. For more detail about the sample and methodology used to produce the estimate, see Section 4.

Drink drive fatalities – drivers over the limit and other casualties

- In the five years between 2007 and 2011, around 1,700 people were killed in drink drive accidents. The majority of these **(68 per cent) were drivers or riders who were over the legal alcohol limit**. The remaining 32 per cent were other road users, involved in the accident but not necessarily over the legal alcohol limit themselves.
- The provisional figures for 2012 show a similar split in fatalities – of the 290 killed, we estimate that around 210 were a driver or rider above the limit.
- These figures suggest that the highest risk of **death** from driving whilst over the legal alcohol limit is to the driver themselves, rather than to other road users. This is unsurprising when we consider that **just over half of fatal drink drive accidents between 2007 and 2011 involved only one vehicle** (i.e. the one being driven whilst over the limit), and no pedestrians[2].
- For comparison, amongst the 12,000 people killed in drink drive accidents between 1979 and 1988, there was **close to a 50-50 split** between drivers and riders above the legal limit and other road users.

Table 2: Split of drink drive accident fatalities between drivers / riders over the legal alcohol limit and other road users: Great Britain, five year groupings 1982 – 2011.

	Number		*Percentage*	
Years	**All drink drive fatalities**	***of which***	**Drivers / riders over the legal alcohol limit**	**Others**
1982 - 1986	5,850		*53*	*47*
1987 - 1991	3,920		*54*	*46*
1992 - 1996	2,870		*57*	*43*
1997 - 2001	2,540		*60*	*40*
2002 - 2006	2,820		*65*	*35*
2007 - 2011	1,670		*68*	*32*

Source: STATS19, Coroners and Procurators Fiscal

Data on the total number of drink drive accidents and casualties, including a time series from 1979, can be found on the Road Accidents and Safety Statistics page, table ras51001.

More detailed data on the characteristics of drink drive accidents and casualties will be available in Reported Road Casualties Great Britain - Annual Report, for publication on 26 September 2013.

[2] By comparison, for all fatal road accidents, 25 per cent involve only one vehicle and no pedestrians.

2. Drink drive limits and definitions

For the purposes of these statistics, a **drink drive accident** is defined as being an incident on a public road in which someone is killed or injured and where at least one 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 ***or***

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.

3. Data sources

Two sources of data are used to compile these statistics. 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 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.

A methodology note describing how the estimates are compiled from these sources can be found here: www.gov.uk/transport-statistics-notes-and-guidance-road-accident-and-safety

4. Strengths and weaknesses of the data

Provisional figures and revisions

As it takes some time for information to be gathered from Coroners and Procurators Fiscal, the estimates published in August each year for the previous year are based on a reduced sample of returns, which may be exposed to bias. They are finalised the following year, when a more complete set of returns is available. For example, in August 2012, provisional figures for 2011 were published. These were finalised in this release (August 2013).

The revisions mainly affect the figures for fatalities and fatal accidents. As discussed in Section 1, around 70 per cent of those killed in drink drive accidents are drivers or riders who are over the legal alcohol limit. Therefore the estimated number of fatalities is highly dependent on information from the Coroners about these casualties.

The table below shows the scale of recent revisions to the number of drink drive fatalities and the number of Coroners' returns they are based on.

Table 3: Comparison of provisional and final drink drive fatality estimates

	Drink drive fatality estimates			Number of returns[2]		All driver / rider fatalities
Year	Provisional	Final	*% change*[1]	Provisional	Final	
2003	560	580	*+ 4*	875	1,348	1,943
2004	590	580	*- 2*	710	1,225	1,771
2005	560	550	*- 2*	774	1,288	1,770
2006	540	560	*+ 4*	709	1,297	1,744
2007	460	410	*-11*	634	1,175	1,612
2008	430	400	*- 7*	555	1,024	1,415
2009	380	380	*- 0*	491	834	1,216
2010	250	240	*- 4*	398	649	1,035
2011	280	230	*-18*	329	660	1,040
2012	290	..	..	260	..	920

1. Percentage change from provisional to final figures.
2. Returns received from Coroners and Procurators Fiscal with blood alcohol content for drivers and riders killed in road accidents.

In recent years the provisional estimate has been based on a relatively small number of returns, reflecting the overall reduction in drivers and riders killed on the roads. The small sample size increases the uncertainty around the estimate and thus there is scope for a large change when it is finalised, as seen for the 2011 figures.

Given the small sample sizes, for future years, we are considering delaying the publication of provisional drink drive estimates until later in the year. This would enable a larger sample to be gathered and improve the robustness of the provisional estimate.

We welcome users' views on this proposal, by email on roadacc.stats@dft.gsi.gov.uk or using the contact details on the front of this release.

A small error was found in the data used to generate the final estimate for 2010 in last year's release. This has now been corrected. The effect was minor within the rounding applied to the figures. The only change was a reduction in seriously injured casualties, from 1,250 to 1,240.

Under-reporting of road accidents

In common with most of the Department for Transport (DfT)'s road safety statistics, the drink drive estimates are based on road accidents which are reported to the police. Comparisons of road accident reports with death registrations show that very few, if any, road accident fatalities are not reported to the police. However, it has long been known that a considerable proportion of non-fatal casualties are not known to the police - hospital, survey and compensation claims data all indicate a higher number of casualties than police accident data would suggest. Proportionally, the unreported number of casualties who sustained slight injuries from a road accident is likely to be higher compared to the unreported number of casualties who sustained serious injuries.

The data used as the basis of the drink drive statistics are therefore not a complete record of all personal injury road accidents, and this should be borne in mind when using the figures. However, police data on road accidents (STATS19), whilst not perfect, remain the most detailed, complete and reliable *single* source of information on road casualties covering the whole of Great Britain, in particular for monitoring trends over time.

An estimate of the total number of road casualties, including those not reported to the police, was made using data from the DfT National Travel Survey in Article 5 of Reported Road Casualties Great Britain (RRCGB): 2010 Annual Report: tinyurl.com/nodh5jb. It will be updated as part of the next RRCGB, due to for publication on 26 September 2013.

5. Background notes

1. Table ras51001, referred to in this release, as well as other data on road accidents can be found here: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport/series/road-accidents-and-safety-statistics
2. More detailed drink driving statistics, including breakdowns by road user type, will be included in Reported Road Casualties Great Britain - Annual Report, due for publication on 26 September 2013, available from the link above.
3. A note on the methodology used to produce the drink drive estimates can be found here: www.gov.uk/transport-statistics-notes-and-guidance-road-accident-and-safety
4. National Statistics are produced to high professional standards as set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They undergo quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. The first assessment report (report number 4) and letter confirming that the statistics have been designated as National Statistics are available here: www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html. The statistics were reassessed during 2013 and the report was published at the link above on the 25th July 2013. The Department will respond to the assessment in Autumn 2013.
5. Details of Ministers and officials who receive pre-release access to these statistics up to 24 hours before release and a full list of definitions used to produce these statistics can be found here: www.gov.uk/transport-statistics-notes-and-guidance-road-accident-and-safety.