

**THE BACS OF DEAD DRIVERS TESTING POSITIVE  
FOR ALCOHOL IN CANADA, 1987-2009:  
WHAT DO THE NUMBERS TELL US?  
January 2012**

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The number of dead drivers who tested positive for alcohol fell sharply from 1987 to the late 1990s, but has subsequently remained relatively steady. In contrast, the percentage of dead drivers in each BAC range has been extremely stable from 1987-2009.

Thus, contrary to what some commentators have suggested, there has been no dramatic increase or, for that matter, any increase in the percentage of dead drivers in the highest BAC range. The so-called “hard-core drinking driver” problem in Canada has remained remarkably consistent over this period, making up a low of 53% to a high of 63% of the total deaths.

The measures taken to reduce impaired driving have had a similar impact across all BAC ranges. Again, contrary to what has been suggested, there is no evidence that drivers in the highest BAC range are immune to drinking and driving countermeasures. The numbers suggest that general countermeasures, such as lowering the *Criminal Code* BAC limit and introducing random breath testing, will likely have similar effects across all BAC ranges. Indeed, the international research suggests that these measures may well have their greatest impact on high BAC drivers.

In summary, the numbers do not support the view that high BAC drivers are a new problem or a problem that is getting worse in Canada. Nor do the numbers suggest that general countermeasures will be ineffective in reducing alcohol-related crash fatalities among such drivers.

### **The BACs of Dead Drivers Testing Positive for Alcohol in Canada: 1987-2009**

Year	No. of Dead Drivers Testing Positive	No. and Percentage of Dead Drivers <sup>1</sup> With Positive BACs at:		
		.01% - .08%	.81% - .15%	.151% +
1987	914	172 (19%)	191 (21%)	551 (60%)
1988	909	186 (20%)	184 (20%)	539 (59%)
1989	870	143 (16%)	206 (24%)	521 (60%)
1990	797	155 (20%)	159 (20%)	483 (60%)
1991	785	127 (16%)	168 (21%)	490 (62%)
1992	762	126 (17%)	165 (22%)	471 (62%)
1993	749	115 (15%)	162 (22%)	472 (63%)
1994	703	127 (18%)	143 (20%)	433 (62%)
1995	702	129 (18%)	143 (20%)	430 (62%)
1996	598	97 (16%)	133 (22%)	368 (62%)

1997	576	108 (19%)	122 (21%)	346 (60%)
1998	559	90 (16%)	136 (24%)	333 (60%)
1999	499	90 (18%)	110 (22%)	299 (60%)
2000	513	91 (18%)	118 (23%)	304 (59%)
2001	525	80 (15%)	123 (23%)	322 (61%)
2002 <sup>2</sup>	511	86 (17%)	134 (26%)*	291 (57%)**
2003	538	87 (16%)	141 (26%)*	309 (57%)**
2004	478	94 (20%)	130 (27%)*	254 (53%)**
2005	541	82 (15%)	159 (29%)*	300 (55%)**
2006	540	100 (19%)	137 (25%)*	303 (56%)**
2007	536	104 (19%)	120 (22%)*	314 (59%)**
2008	515	77 (15%)	137 (27%)*	301 (58%)**
2009	453	64 (14%)	118 (26%)*	271 (60%)**

1. The numbers and percentages have been rounded.

2. The BAC reporting categories were changed to reflect a 2002 *Criminal Code* amendment that made driving with a BAC above .16% an aggravating factor that judges had to consider in sentencing.

\* Drivers with BACs of .81% - .160%.

\*\* Drivers with BACs of .161% or greater.

**Sources: Transport Canada; and the Traffic Injury Research Foundation.**

Although progress has been made, Canada lags far behind the world leaders in traffic safety in terms of the percentage of dead drivers who are legally impaired. Moreover, many of these countries have far higher rates of per capita alcohol consumption than Canada. For example, while Germans consumed 64% more alcohol than Canadians per capita in 1998, only 11% of Germany's fatally-injured drivers were legally impaired, as defined by having a BAC of 0.05% or higher. In contrast, 32% of Canada's fatally-injured drivers in 1998 were legally impaired, as defined by having a BAC above 0.08%.