



November 2005

POSITION on BLOOD ALCOHOL CONTENT (BAC) LEVELS

The Brewers of Europe, the voice of the European brewing sector, promotes sensible drinking and is strongly opposed to drinking and driving. Together with its Members, The Brewers of Europe fully supports measures and initiatives targeted at the problem and has a proven track record of initiatives that form part of our ongoing work designed to combat drinking and driving where it occurs¹.

Adjusting the BAC limits is not the issue

Across the European Union, blood alcohol concentration limits form part of the set of drinking and driving countermeasures. However, the actual numerical value of these limits is of relatively little importance compared to the enforcement, penalties and education messages that have been implemented to support it.

Indeed, there is little evidence that lowering the BAC limit from 80 to 50 mg/dL will, in and of itself, result in fewer alcohol-related traffic deaths.² We note that “the biggest difference in rules exists between Sweden (0.02%) and the UK (0.08%). But looking at the performance of these two Member States in number of deaths per million inhabitants [...] it appears that they were nevertheless the two best-performing countries”³. In addition, lowering the BAC limit has not been shown to address the real problem, i.e. the remaining contingent of drivers who repeatedly drive when intoxicated. Setting a zero BAC limit may also be flawed on the basis that small amounts of ethanol are anyway produced by the natural fermentation of food within the stomach.

Harmonisation is not the solution

In view of the above, introducing a harmonised EU BAC limit would miss the target. On the contrary, including enhanced publicity and awareness in the toolkit of effective countermeasures, together with random testing and renewed enforcement efforts⁴, has been shown to be the most effective.

Enforcement of current laws is key

Deterrence-based approaches, using innovations such as random breath testing that yield few arrests but big accident reductions, have taught police and society the power of deterrence⁵. It is therefore essential that rules are enforced and that breaches thereof are sanctioned⁶.

As stated by the Council in its Conclusions of 10 December 2004 on Road Safety⁷, “enforcement directly linked to public information campaigns is a successful combination and should be further promoted.”

Brewers are key stakeholders in tackling drinking and driving

It is therefore equally crucial that awareness campaigns and initiatives discourage people from drinking and driving. Numerous campaigns supported by the brewing sector are therefore currently running across Europe. Designated driver campaigns, educational videos, driving tests for young people, advertising campaigns, internet games and driving simulators are examples of a wealth of schemes that are developed in partnership and often co-funded by authorities including the European Commission, national transport ministries and road safety institutes, and a variety of key stakeholders such as driving schools and automobile clubs.

¹ See [Worldwide Brewing Alliance Global social responsibility initiatives](#).

² Beirness D and Simpson H (2002). “The safety impact of lowering the BAC limit for drivers in Canada”. Traffic Injury Research Foundation.

³ Communication from the Commission concerning the Commission recommendation of 21 October 2003 on enforcement in the field of road safety. (2004/C 93/04).

⁴ Beirness D and Simpson H (2002). “The safety impact of lowering the BAC limit for drivers in Canada”. Traffic Injury Research Foundation.

⁵ Ross H.L (1982). *Detering the drinking driver: Legal policy and social control*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

⁶ See also our [position on breath alcohol ignition interlock devices](#).

⁷ [Council Conclusions](#).