

ALCOHOL-IMPAIRED DRIVING IN THE UNITED STATES Results from the 2016 TIRF USA Road Safety Monitor

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This fact sheet summarizes the national results of the 2016 USA Road Safety Monitor (USA RSM) on alcohol-impaired driving. This USA RSM is the second annual public opinion survey conducted by the Traffic Injury Research Foundation USA, Inc. (TIRF USA) under sponsorship from Anheuser-Busch. The first USA RSM was conducted in 2015. The survey takes the pulse of the nation regarding the alcohol-impaired driving issue by means of an online survey of a random, representative sample of U.S. drivers aged 21 years or older. A total of 5,050 U.S. drivers completed the poll in October 2016.



This issue provides a general overview of key results obtained from the survey this year and compares them with results from the previous year. Subsequent fact sheets will be produced in the following months that will explore specific features of alcohol-impaired driving in greater detail.

Background

What is the context of alcohol-impaired driving in the U.S.? According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), alcohol-impaired driving fatalities involving a driver with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.08 or greater accounted for 30 percent of total motor vehicle crash fatalities in 2014, corresponding to 9,943 lives lost. Fatality data from 2015 showed that 10,265 people died in alcohol-impaired driving fatalities or 29% of total motor vehicle crash fatalities. Comparing 2015 to 2014, this is a 3.2% increase in the number of lives lost due to alcohol-impaired driving, compared to an overall fatality increase of 7.2% (NCSA 2016). In other words, nearly one-third of road-related deaths were due to alcohol impairment.

When using a longer lookback period, such drunk-driving fatalities have decreased 51% from 1982 to 2015 according to these data. Despite this progress, NHTSA fatality numbers as shown in Figure 1 from 2005 through to 2015 suggest that these declines may have plateaued since 2010, and may again be on the rise (NHTSA 2012, 2016, NCSA 2014, 2016). Therefore, alcohol-impaired driving requires continued attention and action if future improvements are to be realized.

THE TRAFFIC INJURY RESEARCH FOUNDATION USA, Inc.

The mission of the Traffic Injury Research Foundation USA, Inc. (TIRF USA) is to develop and share the knowledge that saves – preventing injuries and loss of life on American roads, reducing related social, health and insurance costs, and safeguarding productivity. TIRF USA is an independent road safety research institute that obtained 501(c)3 non-profit status in the US in 2014.

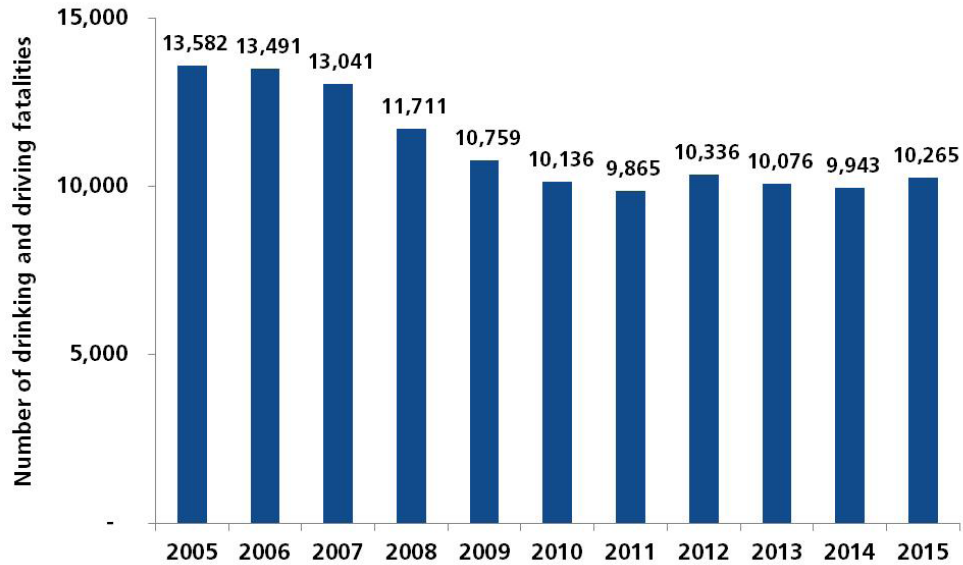
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The knowledge source for safe driving

Figure 1: Alcohol-impaired driving fatalities from 2005 to 2015



Source: NHTSA Traffic Safety Fact Sheets, 2014 and 2015

Alcohol-impaired driving behaviors as reported by U.S. drivers

What are the self-reported alcohol-impaired driving behaviors of U.S. drivers? The 2016 TIRF USA RSM revealed that 5.5% of drivers admitted to driving impaired often or very often and 11.7% admitted to driving when they thought they were over the legal limit one or more times within the previous 12 months. This is a significant increase in self-reported alcohol-impaired driving behavior compared to the 2015 RSM results (Meister et al. 2015), which showed 4.0% of drivers admitted to driving impaired often or

very often and 8.0% admitted to driving when they thought they were over the legal limit one or more times within the previous 12 months (see Figure 2). This is a 37.9% and 46.7% increase respectively.

Respondents were provided a number of different reasons to explain why they drove after drinking when they thought they were probably over the legal limit.

Drunk-driving fatalities decreased 51% from 1982 to 2015, but progress in recent years is being eroded.

Figure 2: Percent of U.S. drivers self-reporting alcohol-impaired driving in 2015 and 2016

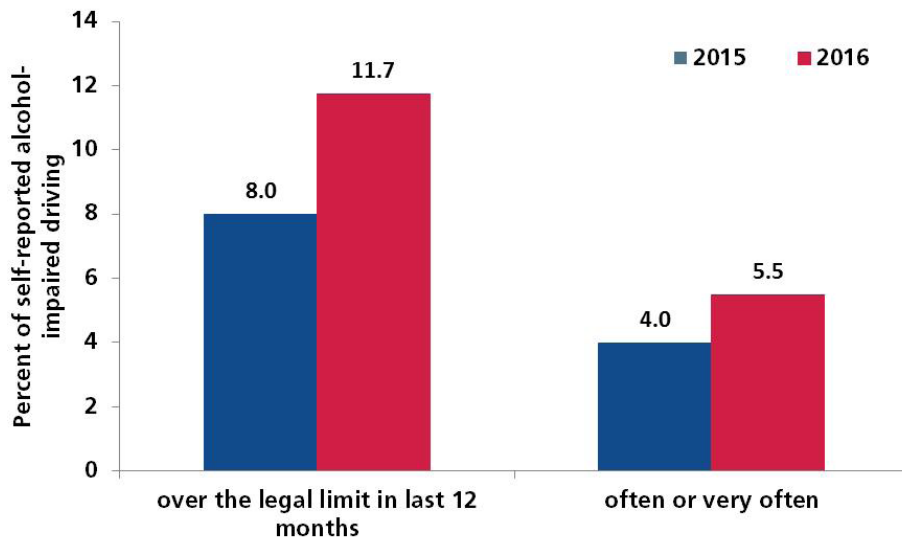
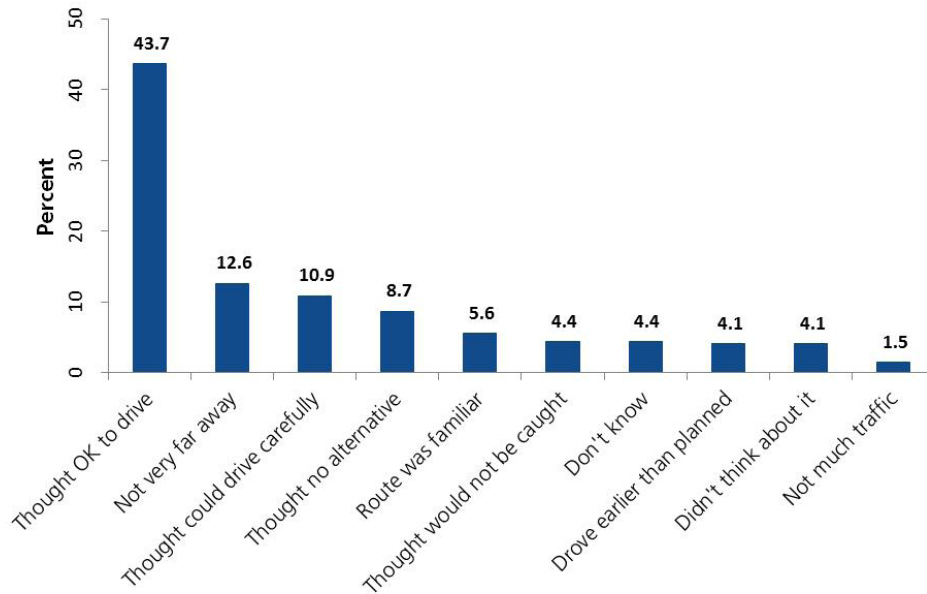


Figure 3: Why respondents drove when they thought they were over the legal limit

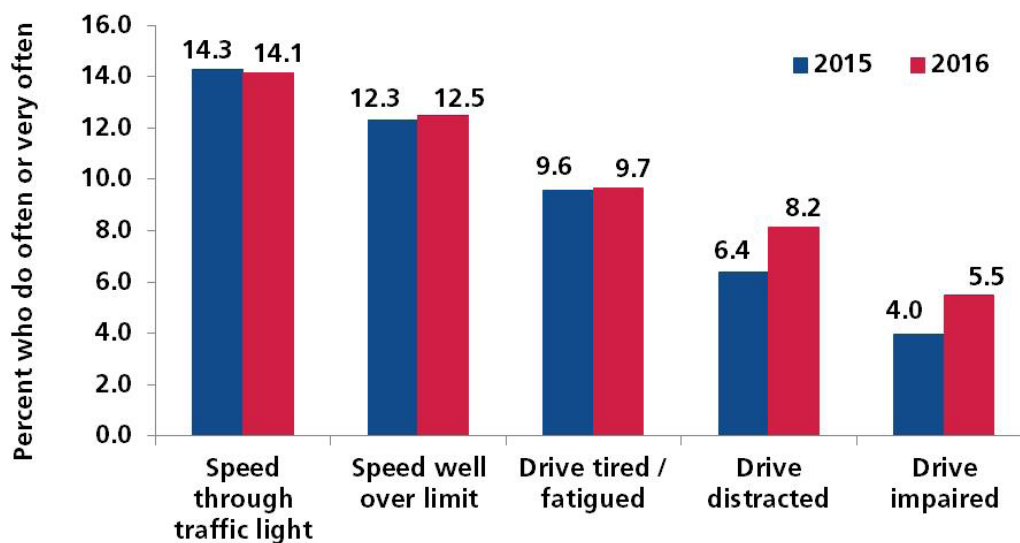


As can be seen in Figure 3, the two most frequent reasons given, which represented more than half of all responses, corresponded to drivers who thought they were “okay” to drive (43.7%) and drivers who said that they were not driving very far (12.6%). Also, 8.7% said they thought there was no alternative. These results are consistent with the 2015 RSM responses.

What types of other dangerous driving behaviors are reported by drivers? To provide context regarding alcohol-impaired driving, the following figure shows how often U.S. drivers reported they engage in other

dangerous driving behaviors in 2015 and 2016. As can be seen in Figure 4, the most frequent behavior was to often or very often speed up through a traffic light (14.1%), followed by speed well over the limit (12.5%), drive tired or fatigued (9.7%), drive distracted (8.2%), and drive impaired by alcohol (5.5%). The 2015 RSM results were consistent for all responses with the exception of a 27.7% significant increase in distracted driving (from 6.4% to 8.2%) and a 37.9% significant increase in driving impaired from alcohol (from 4.0% to 5.5%).

Figure 4: Percent of U.S. drivers who often or very often engage in dangerous driving behaviors in 2015 and 2016



Profile of people who drive impaired

What are the characteristics of respondents who reported driving while they thought they were over the legal limit? Data were analyzed to determine if there were any relationships between people who reported driving while they thought they were over the legal limit within the last 12 months and their sex, age, the distance they drove, the number of tickets issued, whether they have previously been injured in a collision, and their marital status. The odds of males admitting to this behavior were 152.3% greater than for females. In terms of age, the odds of driving while they thought they were over the legal limit decreased by 33.9% for



every ten year increase in age. For those drivers who had previously been injured in a collision the odds were not significantly different than for those who had not

been injured. Among drivers who had two or more traffic tickets (violations) in the last 12 months, the odds were 757.9% greater than for those who had only one or no tickets.

What are the characteristics of respondents who reported driving impaired often or very often?

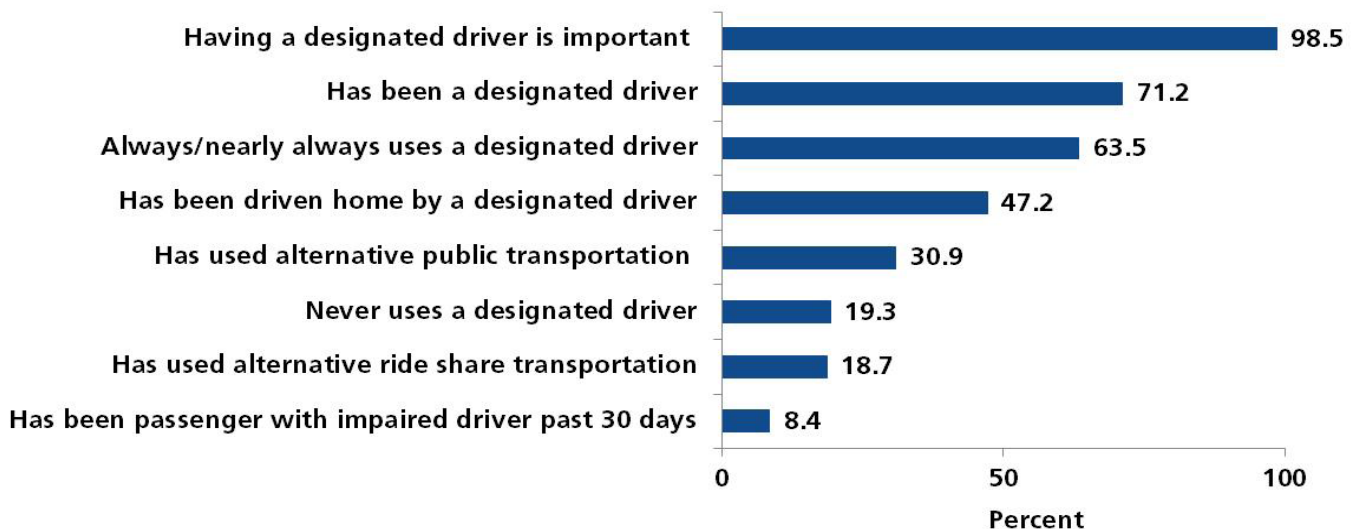
Among U.S. drivers who reported driving impaired often or very often, similar characteristics to those reported above were found. The odds of being a male and admitting to driving impaired often or very often were 127.2% greater than if the driver was female. For every ten year increase in age, the odds decreased by 35.4%. U.S. drivers having had two or more traffic tickets were 1,708.9% more likely to admit to this behavior.

These results are consistent with existing literature (e.g., sex and traffic violations) and therefore reinforces the need to conduct targeted messaging to certain demographics of drivers, notably younger – adult – males with a history of offending.

Designated drivers and anti-impaired driving campaigns

How do U.S. drivers view and make use of designated drivers as an alternative to alcohol-impaired driving? Among U.S. drivers, 98.5% think that having a designated driver is important when planning to go out with friends where there will be drinking (see Figure 5). In contrast, there appears to be a significant difference between what they think

Figure 5: Views and use of designated drivers



they should do and what they actually do. To illustrate, 19.3% said they never use a designated driver when planning to drink with friends. This suggests there is a gap since nearly everyone agreed that designated drivers were important but a large proportion admitted to never using this option. These numbers are consistent with the 2015 RSM results. Equally concerning was that 8.4% of U.S. drivers admitted to riding in a vehicle with an impaired driver in the past 30 days. This shows an increase of 57.1% compared to 2015 when only 5.3% of respondents admitted to this behavior.

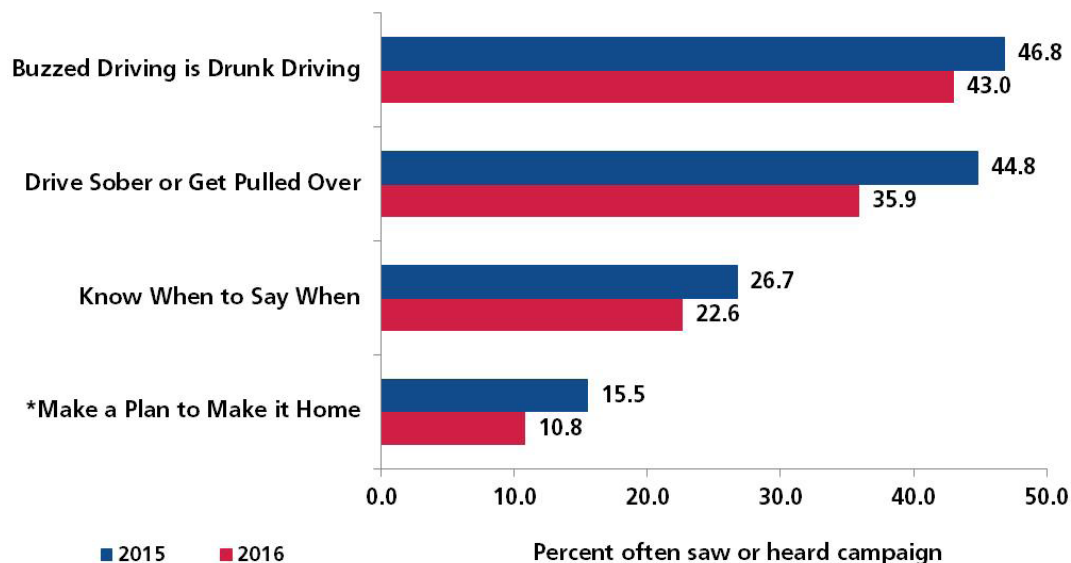
Respondents were also asked other questions related to the use of designated drivers. The survey revealed that 71.2% of U.S. drivers reported that they had been a designated driver. In terms of using alternative transportation, 47.2% have used a designated driver, 30.9% have used some form of public transportation such as a taxi or bus and 18.7% have used alternative ride share services such as Uber or Lyft. In absolute numbers, this corresponds to approximately 142 million drivers aged 21 years or older who have been a designated driver (71.2% of an estimated population of 200 million drivers aged 21 years or older), 94 million who have used a designated driver (47.2% of 200 million), 62 million who have used some form of public transportation (30.9% of 200 million) and 37 million who have used alternative ride share services (18.7% of 200 million).

To provide a more general picture, 54.0% of U.S. drivers reported either using a designated driver or alternative transportation (an estimated 108 million drivers aged 21 years or older) and 80.1% reported using a designated driver, being a designated driver, or using alternative transportation (an estimated 160 million drivers aged 21 years or older). These numbers are consistent with the 2015 responses.

How aware are drivers of national anti-impaired driving campaigns? To gauge the level of awareness among U.S. drivers regarding alcohol-impaired driving campaigns, respondents were asked how often they saw or heard four different national anti-impaired driving campaigns (see Figure 6). “Buzzed Driving is Drunk Driving” was the campaign drivers most frequently reported seeing or hearing often or very often (43.0%), followed by “Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over” (35.9%), “Know When to Say When” (22.6%), and “Make a Plan to Make it Home” (10.8%). Each of these categories have shown significant decreases from the 2015 responses (Figure 6).

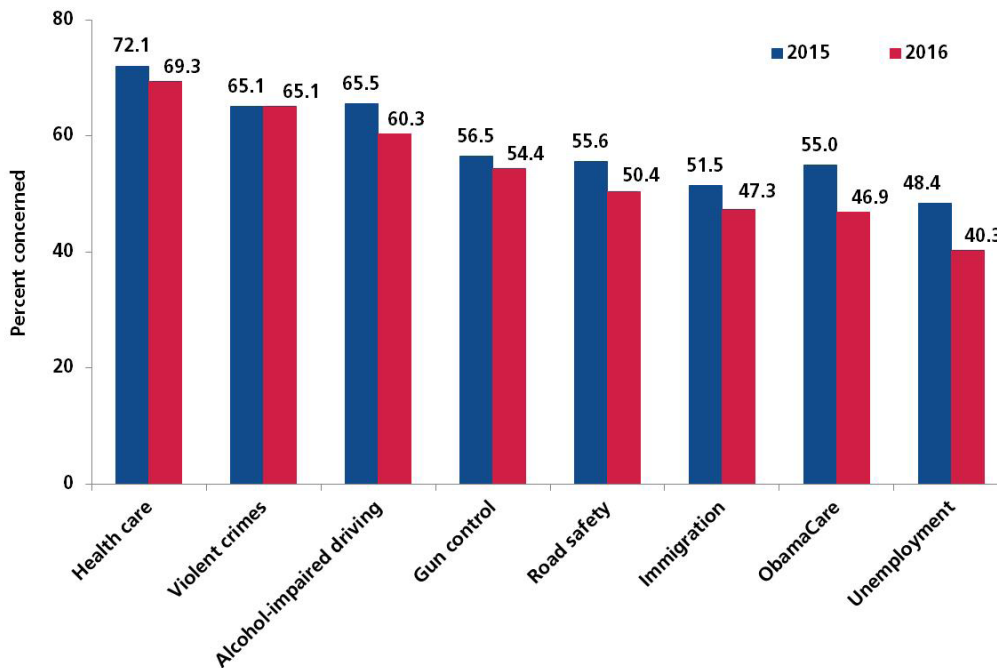
Some of these campaigns have been in operation for years yet the majority of drivers in the U.S. do not report seeing or hearing these campaigns often. This may be due in part to the fact that some campaigns are conducted only at certain times of the year, such as Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over which runs in August through to the Labor Day long weekend. However, the

Figure 6: Percent of U.S. drivers who have often or very often seen or heard four anti-impaired driving campaigns



*A new slogan “Give A Damn, Don’t Drive Drunk” was launched in the 4th quarter of 2016.

Figure 7: Percent of U.S. drivers who are very or extremely concerned about different societal issues in 2015 and 2016



results may also signal that there is a stronger need to, or more consistently, reach out to the public with more information and public education around anti-impaired driving messaging.

Alcohol-impaired driving relative to other issues

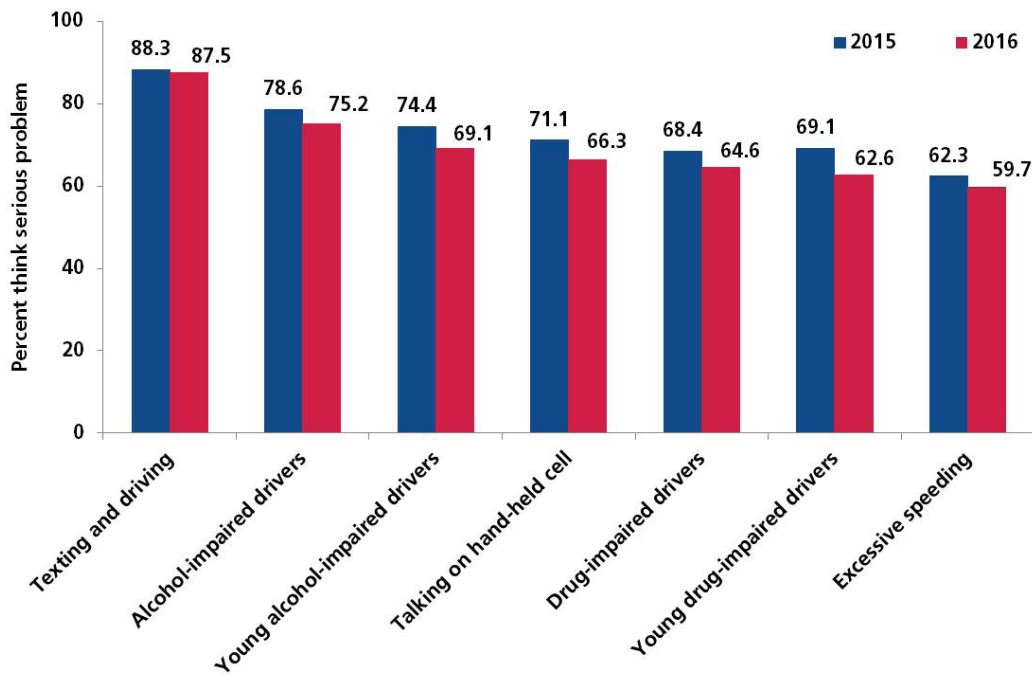
Where does the issue of alcohol-impaired driving sit on the public agenda? Drivers were asked to rate how concerned they were about eight societal issues. Among U.S. drivers, 69.3% reported that they were very or extremely concerned about health care followed by violent crime at 65.1% and alcohol-impaired driving at 60.3%. With the exception of violent crimes, these responses are slightly lower but significantly different from those in 2015 (see Figure 7). Respondents reported that they were very or extremely concerned about other issues to a lesser extent, including gun control (54.4%), road safety (50.4%), immigration (47.3%), ObamaCare (46.9%), and unemployment (40.3%). Although the issue of alcohol-impaired driving is not the top concern, it is a prevalent concern for most U.S. drivers.

Is alcohol-impaired driving a major road safety problem for U.S. Drivers? Drivers were also asked to report the extent to which they viewed different road safety issues to be serious problems. The most serious

problem identified by drivers was texting and driving at 87.5% (see Figure 8). Given the increased use of cell phone technology, it is perhaps not surprising that this problem was deemed as the most serious issue. Nonetheless, alcohol-impaired driving and young drivers impaired by alcohol were considered the next two most serious issues at 75.2% and 69.1%, respectively, demonstrating that this topic is still considered an important problem by many drivers. A number of other road safety issues also continued to be a concern for the majority of U.S. drivers such as talking on hand-held devices (66.3%), drug-impaired drivers (64.6%), young drug-impaired drivers (62.6%), and excessive speed (59.7%). Slight decreases for these issues were observed compared to the 2015 responses. All these decreases were significant except for texting and driving.



Figure 8: Percent of U.S. drivers who think various road safety issues are a serious or very serious problem in 2015 and 2016



Conclusions

Increases in the prevalence of alcohol-impaired driving were observed in comparison to last year’s RSM. This was evident by an increase in self-reported alcohol-impaired driving behavior (both in terms of driving impaired and driving over the legal limit in the last 12 months) and an increase in those who chose to ride in a vehicle with an impaired driver. These results may help to explain the increase in the 2015 NHTSA alcohol-impaired driving fatalities.

When asked why respondents drove after drinking when they thought they were probably over the legal limit, the majority of them answered they thought they were “okay” to drive. It appears an opportunity exists in this regard as this poll also showed a decrease in awareness of alcohol-impaired driving campaigns, speaking to the importance of intensifying the effort to educate U.S. drivers about the risks of alcohol-impaired driving. The same is probably true of designated drivers, safe rides and public transportation. To illustrate, although 98.5% of respondents reported they thought that having a designated driver is important when planning to go out and drinking will occur, the reported use of a designated driver is low. Furthermore, even when drivers are aware of ride sharing programs or public transportation in their area, these programs are not widely used. And, the poll

showed 8.7% said they thought there was no alternative available.

While these findings suggest progress is eroding, alcohol-impaired driving and young drivers impaired by alcohol were considered two of the most serious issues in the U.S. In other words, U.S. drivers clearly consider this to be a top concern. This can be used as an opportunity to voice the need for strong support to raise awareness about alternatives to impaired driving such as designated drivers and ride sharing.

About the poll

These results are based on 5,050 drivers who responded to the 2016 TIRF USA RSM in October of 2016, an annual public opinion survey developed and conducted by TIRF USA. Results can be considered accurate within plus or minus 1.4%, 19 times out of 20. The data were stratified and weighted by sex, age, and region. The majority of the questions were answered using a scale from one to six where six indicated high agreement, concern, or support and one indicated low agreement, concern, or support, as well as numerous yes/no questions. All of the respondents completed the survey online.

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