



# MICAP/AADIF

Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems  
American Alcohol and Drug Information Foundation  
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## Binge Drinking (Continued)

Remind parents of Junior-High, Senior-High, and College youth in your church or club or group to speak with their youth about the dangers of under-aged and binge-drinking. While that's not a guarantee that a youth won't binge-drink, self-reporting by youth indicate that it makes a huge difference in their saying "no" to the peer pressure that goes along with it.

Send a contribution to MICAP so we can continue to publish the MICAP-RECAP and inform our state and national elected officials about a better public policy than we have at the present time.

Doing one or more of the above-listed items will make a difference for the better in your community, our state, and our nation. You will be glad that you did. Thank You!

### NOTES:

1. <http://responsibility.org/blog/2014/back/back-campus-college-binge-drinking>
2. <http://www.cspinet.org/booze/collfact1.htm>
3. <http://hub.jhu.edu/2014.08/19/maryland-alcohol-study-dan-iels>
4. <http://www.USNEWS.com/education/blogs/the-college-experience/2011/11/02know-the-facts-about-collegeo-binge-drinking>
5. <http://touch.mcall.com/#section/1985/article/p2p-8015380>
6. [Pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/UnderagedDrinking/Under-agefact.htm](http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/UnderagedDrinking/Under-agefact.htm)
7. Lansing State Journal's USA TODAY insert, January 7, 2015, p.3B
8. <http://archive.sph.harvard.edu/cas/Documents/dying-article/>

## Your Gifts Make a Difference

Consider sponsoring an Issue of our MICAP/RECAP for \$1,500.00. Please phone (517) 999-0013 if you are interested. Your gift will inform State and National officials,

churches and individuals about a better policy regarding beverage alcohol. As always, your donation would be tax deductible to the extent allowed under state law. Thank you.



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# MICAP RECAP

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## Alcohol Problems Remain Major Issues: The Latest Research and Statistics By Vernon Smith, MICAP Vice President

The mission of the Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems is to provide information and to raise awareness of the issues and consequences of drinking alcohol. The importance of this mission is continuously seen in the findings from research that documents the toll that alcohol takes in the form of illness, injury and death, work performance, family problems and personal relationships.

Articles in highly respected professional journals highlight important current issues. One important public policy and safety issue receiving increasing attention is driving when impaired, but not legally impaired.

Drinking and Driving, Even When "Minimally Buzzed."

Everyone knows that drinking and driving don't mix. What isn't so well known is that drivers who drink only small amounts of alcohol are also impaired, and more likely to cause serious and fatal accidents, even when their blood alcohol concentration (BAC) level is well below the 0.08% legal limit.

In 2013, legally drunk drivers with BAC at or above .08% were directly responsible for 10,076 fatalities in the U.S., or 31% of all auto accident deaths, according to statistics just released by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

However, deaths due to drinking alcohol were actually much higher than the official count of 10,076, because those deaths are only those for drivers above the .08% legal limit, and research now shows that .08% has almost no relation to a safe limit. A 2014 study in the journal *Injury Prevention* concludes that any level of alcohol in the blood results in a significant increase in the likelihood of a driver being assigned sole responsibility for an accident causing death to the driver or another person.

The findings show the impact of drinking alcohol begins with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) as low as .01% and increases progressively as blood alcohol concentration increases.

This finding is significant because under current law, the courts act as though there is a fine line at .08%, above which there is a danger to driving a car, boat, snowmobile or ATV, and below which it is okay to drive. Unfortunately, this is not the case. When it comes to the threat to personal safety, injury and death posed by impaired drivers on our roads, trails and waterways, even the smallest amounts of alcohol mean an elevated risk of causing a serious accident.

In this study, lead researcher Dr. David P. Phillips looked at police reports for every two-car accident that involved a fatality where just one driver was solely and officially at blame for the crash, a total of 570,731 accidents from 1994 through 2011. The data show blood alcohol concentration for all drivers in increments of one hundredth of a percent.

## Alcohol Problems Remain (continued)

The researchers then calculated the relationship between a driver who had "sole official blame" for the fatality and his or her blood alcohol concentration, from zero to .24%.

The findings were dramatic. "Minimally buzzed" drivers, with a very low BAC of just .01% were 46% more likely to be solely responsible for a fatal accident than drivers with 0% BAC. Drivers with a BAC of just .04% were almost twice as likely to be officially blamed than the sober drivers in the other car.

How easy is it to reach a low but legal BAC of just .01% or .04%? It depends on the individual, but for example, a 125 pound woman would likely achieve a BAC of .02% when drinking a small (4 ounce) glass of wine over an hour. A 185 pound man would likely have a BAC above .04% after drinking 3 beers over a two hour span.

The medical explanation for these findings is that even at these relatively low levels of BAC, people are less able to track a moving object, and are less able to do two simple tasks at the same time, such as driving and talking. As a result, even small amounts of alcohol significantly increase the probability that an accident will occur that causes a death.

Experts also note that even when a person stops drinking, it takes time for the body to process the alcohol. When a person stops drinking, it takes 40 minutes for BAC to drop by one-hundredth of a percent. So if a person drinks to a point where BAC reaches .06% and drinks no more, then 3 hours later BAC would still be above the .01% "minimally buzzed" level where drivers were 46% more likely to be solely and officially blamed for a fatal crash.

### Implications of these Findings for each of us

Clearly, anyone who drinks any amount of alcohol should not be a driver of a car, boat, snowmobile or ATV. Any level of BAC means you are at an increased risk of causing an accident that injures or kills you or someone else.

### Policy Implications of these Findings

As the study concludes, there is "no safe combination of drinking and driving – no point when it is harmless to consume alcohol and get behind the wheel of a car." In other words, there is no "bright line" between a BAC level that is safe or not safe. The higher the BAC, the more likely a driver is to be assigned sole blame for an accident causing a fatality, but any level of alcohol is associated with a significantly increased risk of causing an accident.

In the interest of public safety, the findings suggest that the current legal BAC limit of .08% is much too high and should be reduced. Interestingly, the legal limit is .05% in over 100 countries, including most of Europe.

The study author David Phillips, when interviewed by the University of California San Diego News, observed that: "Buzzed" drivers are often not punished more severely than their sober counterparts. In practice, Phillips said, "police, judges and the public at large treat BAC 0.08% as a sharp, definitive, meaningful boundary, and do not impose severe penalties on those below the legal limit. That needs to change," Phillips said. "The law should reflect what official accident investigators are seeing."

"Lowering the legal BAC limit is likely to reduce injuries and save lives."

This article was prepared by Vernon Smith, from the following sources: David P. Phillips, Ana L. R. Sousa and Rebecca T. Moshfegh, "Official blame for drivers with very low blood alcohol content: there is no safe combination of drinking and driving," Injury Prevention, January 2014. Quotations are from a story based on an interview with the author in: UC San Diego News Center, "Unsafe at Any Level: Very Low Blood Alcohol Content Associated with Causing Car Crashes." January 16, 2014. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) data accessed January 28, 2015 at <http://www.nhtsa.gov/NCSA>

## BINGE-DRINKING: A COLLEGE PHENOMENA, AND MORE

by Rev. W. J. (Bill) Amundsen, Retired, MICAP Board Treasurer

**A COLLEGE PHENOMENA** Hans House, an M.D. from Iowa tells us that records at the University of Iowa show that the number of arrests for alcohol-related offenses is substantially higher in the last week of August and the first week of September. These correlate precisely with the first football game of the season. He also indicates that students who are fans of athletics are more likely to binge drink

and face negative consequences from alcohol use than are other students at the university.<sup>1</sup> Several sources indicate that over 30,000 college students across the nation require medical treatment in an Emergency Room after over-dosing (bingeing) on alcohol.<sup>2</sup>

The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) reports that binge-drinkers consume about 91% of the beverage alcohol (B/A) which college students reported drinking and 68% of that was consumed by frequent binge-drinkers. The same report indicates that college students who find themselves intoxicated before age 19 are also more likely to become alcohol dependent and frequent heavy drinkers.<sup>2</sup> That rings true with old information indicating that persons between the ages of 15 and 21 are four times more likely to become heavy drinkers and/or have problems with alcohol later in life than those who do not drink until they are 21 years of age and older.

Because binge-drinking had become the Number 1 issue on college campuses in Maryland, John Hopkins University President Ronald J. Daniels empowered a study of 4,500 Maryland students (from 9 college and university campuses) which indicated the following:

One-half of all Maryland undergraduates engaged in Binge-Drinking (B-D). 60% of the students under 21 had used alcohol. 33% had blacked out. 66% of the students had suffered hangovers. Too many admitted to having driven while drunk, rode with an impaired driver, missed class(es), did poorly on a test, had run-ins with the police, harmed themselves, or, had unprotected sex. All of the above happened because of B-D.<sup>3</sup>

The US NEWS AND WORLD REPORT, defined Binge-Drinking as drinking that raises the Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) to 0.08% or above. While some quibble with the definition of Binge-Drinking (they are often related to or buy into the liquor industry's values), the standard definition includes the following: Males who drink 5 or more standard drinks in any 2-hour period; and women who drink four or more drinks in any 2-hour period.<sup>4</sup>

**AND MORE (Not Just a College Phenomena)** Obviously, B-D doesn't always begin or end with our college experiences. The World Health Organization (WHO) tells us that 38.2% of the people in the world drink, and those who drink average 17 liters per year. WHO tells us that 16% of drinkers (of all ages) engage in heavy episodic drinking (Binge-Drinking). About one-fourth of all Russian men die before they reach their mid-fifties, largely from drinking to excess. Many men in Russia reported drinking three or more bottles of vodka per week.<sup>5</sup>

Even before college, Jr. and Sr. High students engage in B-D. A National Institute of Health (NIA) pamphlet tells us, "(Students) ages 12 through 20 drink 11% of all alcohol consumed in the U.S. Although youth drink less often than adults, when they drink, they drink more. Young people drink 90% of the alcohol they drink by B-D! 6.0 Million young people had 5 or more drinks on the same occasion (within a few hours) at least ONCE in the past month. 2.1 Million

young people had 5 or more drinks on the same occasion, on 5 OR MORE DAYS over the past month."<sup>6</sup>

Besides being a critical issue for all colleges and universities, known consequences of B-D include the following:

B-D kills 6 persons per day in the USA,<sup>7</sup> higher chances for alcohol addiction, organ damage to liver and kidneys, alcohol poisoning, and assault by a student who has been B-D.

### WHY IS THIS PROBLEM IN OUR SOCIETY NOW?

Someone has said (I cannot find my reference, but I believe it to be true): "The epidemic of B-D going on in our society is caused by a failure of our college student, law enforcement, higher education, and our own attitudes about drinking."

"It is also caused by the economic success of the B/A industry. Big Alcohol is still on the offensive. And with mergers and buy-outs, it is now world-wide more than it ever has been. Big Alcohol needs the next generation of drinkers to support their net profits. Someone has written, at the Harvard School of Public Health, "They (BIG ALCOHOL) expect a huge price in blood and brain cells each semester."<sup>8</sup>

### WHAT CAN OUR COMMUNITIES DO TOGETHER?

The literature is quite clear that preventing B-D requires the same actions which are required for abusive drinking and under-aged drinking. Those include: A) Campus Health Center brief intervention programs. B) Strategies focusing on the college environment including the wider city or village in which it lies, and including the Greek Communities and Sports Venues within the College or University. C) Publicizing and enforcing Under-aged Drinking and Zero-Tolerance laws for drivers under 21 years of age. D) Partnerships between college and local residential and business communities to reduce access to B/A and to address violations. E) Increasing the price of B/A with taxation as well as the elimination of low-cost specials in Happy Hours. All of the research indicates that when B/A is more expensive people drink less and there are fewer alcohol-related problems.

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

April is Alcohol Awareness Month. We, at MICAP, hope that you will do just ONE thing that would cut abusive, under-aged, and binge-drinking in our time. The list is above. Is there ONE THING on that list with which you could help? Here are a couple of other suggestions.

Talk to a city council member and explain to them that the proliferation of beverage alcohol licenses leads to more drinking and more problematic drinking. Ask them to hold the line on licenses. The state is glad to issue licenses. The state receives a lot of revenue from just one license. But fewer licenses cut under-aged, abusive, and binge drinking.