



MICAP RECAP

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*Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems
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Could Michigan Save Lives by Lowering the BAC Limit to .05%?

By Vernon K. Smith, MICAP Board Member

AADIF/MICAP

(517) 999-0013

info@micap.org

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Utah is the first state to adopt .05% BAC limit. Could Michigan be next?

Earlier this year, Utah became the first state to lower its legal limit for impaired driving from a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .08% (now in force in all states) to .05%. In adopting the new lower limit, Utah became the first state to adopt the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) recommendation of .05%.

In signing the bill, Utah Governor Herbert emphasized that this legislation would save lives of the Utah residents. The primary sponsor of the bill, Republican Representative Norm Thurston, said, "It is all about safety."

It wasn't easy. The legislature and Governor adopted the new limit despite opposition from the tourism, restaurant and beverage industries. Sarah Longwell, director of the American Beverage Association, was quoted in Utah news stories as saying, "Utah legislators missed an opportunity to target hard-core drunk drivers who cause the majority of drunk driving fatalities and instead decided to criminalize perfectly responsible behavior."

Why the NHTSA recommended lowering the BAC limit to .05%

Across the U.S., alcohol-impaired drivers account for one-third of all traffic deaths and injuries. Almost 10,000 people are killed every year in motor vehicle crashes where the driver is alcohol impaired. That's more than 28 fathers, mothers and children whose lives are lost every day.

At the top of the NHTSA's list of recommendations to reduce that number of deaths due to alcohol-impaired drivers is for states to lower the blood alcohol concentration limit from the current level of .08% to .05%.

Each state sets its own limit for impaired driving. Until 2000, many states including Michigan had a BAC limit of .10%. By the year 2004, all states had lowered the limit to .08% for motor vehicles. In 2014 Michigan joined other states in reducing the BAC limit for boaters and other vehicles from .10% to .08%.

Could Michigan Save Lives by Lowering the BAC Limit to .05%

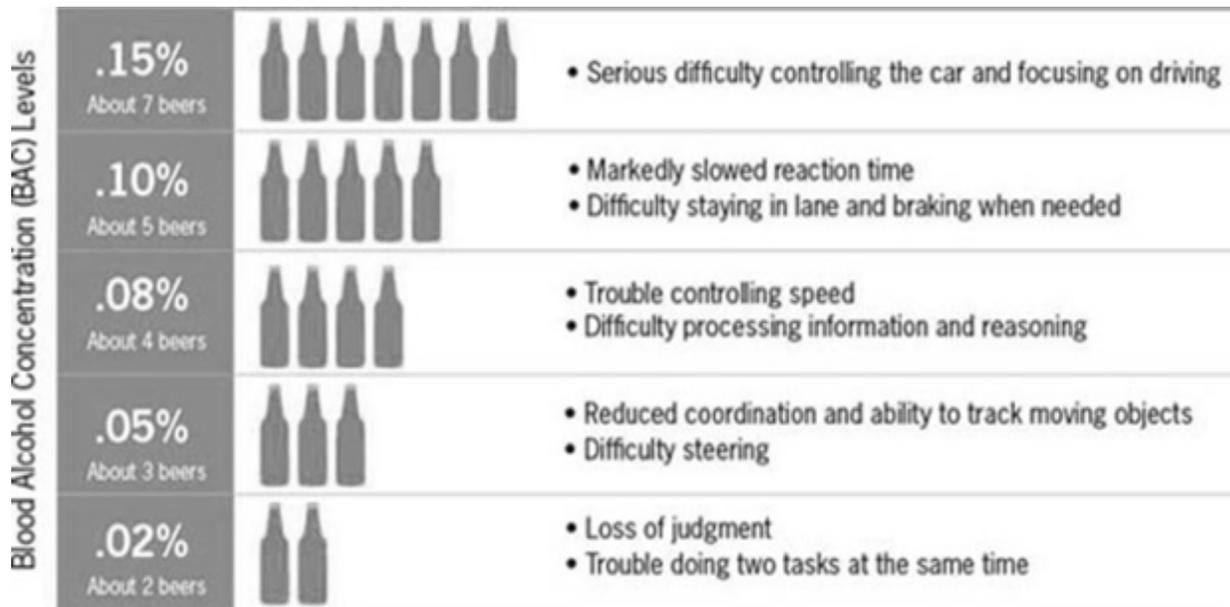
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NHTSA cited three important reasons a state should lower the BAC limit from .08% to .05%.

1. Alcohol impairs critical driving tasks;
2. Crash risk is consistently and significantly elevated by the time an individual reaches a BAC of 0.05“%”;
3. Lowering the BAC limit has been shown to reduce crashes, injuries and deaths.

“**The scientific evidence** shows that impairment begins with the first drink, and any alcohol consumption associated with driving reduces safety,” according to the NHTSA.

Having a BAC limit of .05% would make quite a significant difference. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lists the following effects of various BAC levels:



Source of Graphic: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The NHTSA also cited studies showing the effect of lowering the BAC limit from .08% to .05%. For example, fatal alcohol-impaired crashes dropped by 18% in Queensland and 8% in New South Wales when Australia reduced the limit to .05%.

The NHTSA also cited studies showing that compared to sober drivers, the likelihood of being in a crash was 38% higher for those with a BAC of .05%. For those at .07% the crash risk doubled, and for those at .08% the crash risk was 2.69 times higher.

The legal BAC limit is .05% or lower in most countries

Around the world, the U.S. is now an outlier with the legal BAC limit of .08%. The limit is .05% or less in over 100 countries, including countries in Europe such as Germany and France known for their love of beer or wine, and also known for their intolerance of impaired driving. Below is a partial list of countries and their legal BAC limit:

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.00 percent: Afghanistan, Barbados, Belarus, Brazil, Burma (Myanmar), Czech Republic, Guinea, Hungary, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Nepal, Panama, Qatar, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Tunisia, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Yemen.

.01 to .02 percent: Albania, Guyana, China, Colombia, Estonia, Norway, Poland, Sweden.

.03 percent: Bosnia and Herzegovina, India, Japan, Mali, Montenegro, Taiwan.

.04 percent: Cuba, Lithuania, Samoa.

.05 percent: Aruba, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Chile, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Greenland, Holland, Hong Kong, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Laos, Latvia, Lebanon, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Manitoba, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, North Korea, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Saint Martin, San Marino, Serbia, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland, Syria, Tanzania, Thailand, Turkey, Scotland, Venezuela.

Should Michigan Lower its BAC Limit to .05%?

The evidence is clear that lowering the BAC limit to .05% would save lives. Perhaps it is time for policy makers in Michigan to consider making our state a safer place by lowering the legal limit for impaired driving from .08% to .05%.

Sources: This article was prepared from information available online at <https://www.nhtsa.gov/> and <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/>, and from various press and online reports, including <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-utah-alcohol-limit-20170324-story.html> and an article by Brad J. Uren, Assistant Professor of Emergency Medicine at the University of Michigan, published by The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/drunk-driving-laws-dont-match-the-research-56242>.

DRINKING GUIDELINES: LET'S HELP SPREAD THE WORD

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

Because of the culture around us, MICAP has long been a TEMPERANCE group and not a PROHIBITION group. We believe we get a better hearing because of that. But we are also concerned that beverage alcohol (B/A) not be used carelessly. Unfortunately, statistics show that the top 20% of adults who drink consume 6.4 B/A equivalents daily.¹ (See guidelines below). Therefore, we need to get the word out. Would you help us? Please take this information to your Missions or Social Concerns group in your church, mosque or synagogue. Ask them to put it on the bulletin board, or make several copies for them to post, so persons can take one to give to a friend.

If alcohol is consumed, it should be in moderation. Guidelines from the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) suggest 1 drink per day for women and 2 drinks per day for men. The guidelines include DRINK EQUIVALENTS. A drink equivalent equals 12 fluid oz. of 5% beer, 5 fluid oz. of 12% wine or 1.5 fluid oz. of 80-proof distilled spirits.

¹ Suggested men's guidelines: Not more than 2 drink-equivalents daily.

Suggested women's guidelines: Not more than 1 drink-equivalent daily.

Those who should not drink: Women who are pregnant or trying to become pregnant.

Those under the legal drinking age.

Those whose medication may react negatively with alcohol consumption.



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Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems
American Alcohol and Drug Information Foundation
Mailing address: P.O. Box 10212, Lansing, MI 48901

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A Donation to MICAP Would be Wonderful

MICAP is a small non-profit organization with a mission to provide information about the consequences of alcohol abuse, and to promote public policies that address these issues. It is a big task, and we are committed to doing our part.

For this work, MICAP depends 100% on gifts from people like you. Our work year-round depends directly on these gifts. MICAP could not do its work without your financial support, which truly makes a difference in this important work.

MICAP is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Your gift to MICAP is tax deductible to the extent allowed by the tax code. Please use the enclosed envelope, or send your check to: MICAP, P.O. Box 10212, Lansing, MI 48901. From the bottom of our heart, we thank you.