

**TO:** Council

**FROM:** Community Advisor Road Safety

**MEETING DATE:** 15 December 2008

**SUBJECT:** **BLOOD ALCOHOL CONCENTRATION**

## SUMMARY

### **Alcohol and Road Trauma – A Call for Lower Blood Alcohol Concentrations**

The Point Zero Five Group calls for support for the lowering of the legal blood alcohol concentration for driving to 50mg alcohol/100 ml blood for adult drivers.

The Point Zero Five Group is an Auckland based group of individuals and agencies that have an interest in alcohol and road safety. The group is comprised of members of the New Zealand Police, Alcohol Healthwatch, Brain Injury Association, public health professionals, road safety co-ordinators, SADD, injury prevention professionals and treatment specialists.

The Point Zero Five Group aims to reduce alcohol-related harm in the community by reducing the blood alcohol concentration for driving from 80mg alcohol/100ml blood to 50mg alcohol/100ml blood. This is supported by the Dunedin Road Safety Partners Group.

The Point Zero Five Group aims to take signed letters of support to Parliament. Achieving a law change is a very long process. Support from local authorities would be greatly appreciated.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR:

- |  |    |
|--|----|
| (i) <b>Policy:</b>                     | No |
| (ii) <b>Approved Annual Budget:</b>    | No |
| (iii) <b>LTCCP/ Funding Policy:</b>    | No |
| (iv) <b>Activity Management Plans:</b> | No |
| (v) <b>Community Boards:</b>           | No |

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Dunedin City Council:

- support and endorse the Point Zero Five Group policy statement to lower the blood alcohol limit for driving to 50mg alcohol/100 ml blood;
- support accompanying efforts by the Group.

## INTRODUCTION

Alcohol is one of the biggest contributing factors to New Zealand's road death toll. In 2006 alcohol was a contributing factor in:

- 99 fatal traffic crashes;
- 409 serious injury crashes;
- 1128 minor injury crashes. These crashes resulted in 109 deaths, 556 serious injuries and 1768 minor injuries.
- The total social cost of crashes involving drivers under the influence of alcohol/drugs was approximately \$725 million in New Zealand alone. (In 2002 the estimated social cost of drinking related crashes was \$600 million). This figure accounts for about a fifth of the social cost associated with all injury crashes.

The current NZ BAC limits are:

### Adult

Blood = 80 milligrams of alcohol per 100ml of blood  
Breath= 400 micrograms of alcohol per litre of breath

### Youth (under 20 years)

Blood = 30 milligrams of alcohol per 100ml of blood  
Breath= 150 micrograms of alcohol per litre of breath

### Number of Over the Limit Crashes in New Zealand

Year	# Of Over the Limit Alcohol Related Crashes	# of General Crashes
2003	806	10 724
2004	769	10 494
2005	817	10 926
2006	977	11 427
2007	954	11 946
<b>Total</b>	<b>4323</b>	<b>55 517</b>

### Number of Over the Limit Crashes in Dunedin City District

Year	# of Over the Limit Crashes	# of General Crashes %
2003	28	513 5.46
2004	25	502 4.98
2005	37	539 6.86
2006	32	482 6.64
2007	29	499 5.81
<b>Total</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>2535 5.96</b>

### Dunedin City District in Comparison to Southern District Councils 03/07

Council	Number of over limit crashes	# General crashes %
Dunedin City	151	2535 5.96
Clutha	23	547 4.20
Invercargill	56	1088 5.15
Southland	78	843 9.25
Gore	20	212 9.43

Central Otago	26	397	6.55
Queenstown	41	571	7.18
Waitaki	21	479	4.38

## BACKGROUND

The Point Zero Five Group is a representative group of individuals and agencies that have an interest in alcohol and road safety including members of the NZ Police, Alcohol Healthwatch, Road Safety Co-ordinators, Brain Injury Association and public health and treatment specialists. The purpose of the group is to reduce alcohol related harm in the community by reducing the Blood Alcohol Concentration for driving to 50mg alcohol/100ml blood by:

- Advocating for the Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) to be lowered to 0.05.
- Providing accurate information and education about why the BAC should be lowered to 0.05.
- Promoting discussion of issues relating to alcohol and road safety.

## DISCUSSION

Research has shown that important driving skills including vision, steering and braking are adversely affected by even small amounts of alcohol. Significant impairment in driving ability can be seen at alcohol concentrations as low as 20mg.

An alcohol impaired driver has 17 times the risk of being involved in a fatal crash than an unimpaired driver. It also has an impact on the severity of the injuries experienced in a crash.

The relative risk of having a crash is even higher for those aged between 16–19 years old.

<b>Blood Alcohol Concentration</b>	<b>Increased Chance of Death Compared to Sober Drivers</b>
0.03 (30mg)	1.2
0.07 (70mg)	1.5
0.12 (120mg)	2.4
0.17 (170mg)	2.5
0.22 (220mg)	3.7

(Source: Dennis, 2000)

It is believed that the most effective measure that will see a dramatic reduction in our road toll and help meet the targets of the Road Safety Strategy 2010 of less than 300 deaths annually on the road by 2010, is to lower the blood alcohol concentration to 50mg.

Australian research has shown that lowering the legal blood alcohol concentration to 50mg/100ml will not only reduce drink driving at the 50mg–80mg levels but will also reduce drink driving at higher blood alcohol concentrations. After the limit was lowered to 50mg in the Australian Capital Territories there was a 41% reduction in those caught with more than 150mg blood alcohol concentration.

Lower blood alcohol limits encourage drivers to keep a better count of the drinks they consume in order to stay below the limit.

A lower blood alcohol limit allows the driver the opportunity to make more rational decisions about whether to stop drinking and whether or not to drive.

International studies have suggested that lower blood alcohol levels may contribute to positive changes in public attitudes towards drinking and driving.

### **Countries that have a 0.08 BAC Limit**

United Kingdom	Kenya	Paraguay
Ireland	Malaysia	Singapore
Canada	Malta	Uganda
USA - 32 States	Mexico	Uruguay
Botswana	New Zealand	Zimbabwe
Guatemala	Nicaragua	Luxembourg

It should be noted that the United Kingdom is currently under scrutiny by the European Union with regard to its BAC limit being at odds with European Road Safety strategy.

### **Countries that have a 0.05 BAC Limit**

Australia	Argentina	Austria
Belgium	Bulgaria	Croatia
Belarus	Cambodia	Costa Rica
El Salvador	Kyrgyzstan	Latvia
Denmark	Finland	France
Germany	Greece	Iceland
Israel	Italy	Macedonia
Netherlands	Philippines	Portugal
Slovenia	Spain	Mauritius
Peru	Bosnia	South Africa
South Korea	Switzerland	Thailand
Turkey	Venezuela	

### **Countries that have a 0.02 BAC Limit**

Sweden	Norway	Estonia
Russia	Mongolia	Turkmenistan
Poland		

### **Countries that have a 0.00 BAC Limit**

Czech Republic	Hungary	Ethiopia
Romania	Columbia	Nepal
Armenia	Azerbaijan	Panama
Slovak Republic		

### **International Results of Decreasing Blood Alcohol Concentration to 50mg**

- Queensland has seen an 18% reduction in fatal collisions and a 14% reduction in serious crashes.
- Austria has delivered a 9% decrease in alcohol related crashes.
- In Germany the number of alcohol related crashes has more than halved and in France a 30% decline has been observed.
- Belgium has seen a 10% decrease in fatalities.

### **Expected Lives That Could Be Saved in New Zealand With A 50mg BAC**

- Reduction in the number of drink drivers on our roads therefore leading to lives saved and a significant reduction in the number of serious injuries from alcohol impaired driving.
- Taking international reductions into account, New Zealand can expect to save between 14–72 lives and 640–1280 injuries each year.
- If an intensive advertising and enforcement campaign was implemented in conjunction with the reduction in the BAC it is highly probable that even more lives would be saved and more injuries prevented.

## OPTIONS

### Proposed Motion:

The Point Zero Five Group call for the Dunedin City Council to:

- support and endorse our policy statement to lower the blood alcohol limit for driving to 50mg alcohol/100 ml blood;
- support accompanying efforts by the Group

### Advantages

Dunedin City road related alcohol harm statistics are likely to improve with associated social costs decreasing if Government adopts a law change to lower the limit. This may also have flow-on effects for alcohol related harm in general.

Dunedin City commitment to helping achieve 2010 road safety targets is demonstrated.

### Disadvantages

None foreseen at this point

## CONCLUSION

Support reduction of the BAC due to:

1. National and Local Governmental commitments to 2010 Road Safety targets.
2. The continued significance of alcohol-related road trauma both nationally and locally.
3. More action required if the road safety targets of 2010 are to be achieved.
4. Considerable evidence of the road safety and economic benefits of lower BAC levels.

Prepared by:

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Date report prepared: 8 December 2008