



Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New York Puts .08 BAC Driving Limit Into Effect *Studies Show That Up to 40 Lives Could Be Saved Annually Across NYS*

Albany, N.Y., July 1, 2003 – New York’s .08% blood alcohol concentration (BAC) threshold goes into effect today, lowering the amount of alcohol drivers can legally consume and still operate a vehicle on the state’s roadways. The new law is being activated to coincide with the traditional traffic increase associated with the 4th of July holiday period. With 36 states across the nation already enforcing similar .08 BAC laws, New York becomes the 37th state to take a tougher stance against drunk drivers.

“New York State already has one of the best records in the nation for reducing drunk driving fatalities,” says Governor George E. Pataki. “The new .08 law will help to save even more lives and make New York’s roadways safer for everyone. It’s an important piece of legislation – one that a lot of people have worked tirelessly to bring into law – and we should see some very positive benefits moving forward.”

Recent studies indicate that by reducing the legal BAC level to .08% (previously .10%), approximately 40 additional lives could be saved each year in New York State.

“Our STOP DWI programs have resulted in one of the nation’s lowest alcohol related vehicle fatality rates, trailing only Vermont and Utah,” says STOP DWI New York Chairperson Denise Cashmere. “Now we’ve got an opportunity to use .08 to bring about more change. Change perceptions. Change habits. Change the way we think about mixing alcohol and other drugs with motor vehicles.”

All across the state, police are gearing up to enforce the new law, which according to some estimates could mean up to 1,600 additional DWI arrests over the next year. In 2002, more than \$20 million in fines were collected from drunk drivers throughout New York.

According to New York State Police Superintendent James W. McMahon, “Visible and active enforcement is one of the most effective ways to reduce impaired driving. Right now and in the weeks ahead, police officers throughout New York State will be out in force, making sure that the public knows .08 is here... and we’re serious about enforcing it. .08 can save lives, and we intend to do everything we can to make that happen.”

A DWI conviction in New York State can cost more than \$15,000, taking into account fines, legal fees and insurance premium increases.

What Is BAC?

Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) is defined as the level of alcohol in the bloodstream. As the number of alcoholic beverages consumed over a period of time increases, so does the BAC. At .08% BAC, virtually everyone, including habitual drinkers, experiences some degree of driving skill impairment affecting eye movement, judgment, coordination, concentration and speed control.

In a study published in the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* (May, 2000), results showed that a driver with a .08 BAC can be up to 50 times more likely to die in a crash than if he was completely sober (.00 BAC). At .10 BAC – the former BAC limit for drunk driving in New York – the same driver would be up to 240 times more likely to die in a drunk-driving crash. The degree of impairment varies for each individual according to the amount of alcohol consumed, body weight, length of time spent drinking and whether the person ate before or while drinking alcohol.

What It Means to the Average Driver

Anyone drinking alcohol in New York State should consider the following facts before getting into the driver's seat:

- ⌘ A 170-pound male is at .08% BAC after four drinks within one hour.
- ⌘ A 140-pound female is at .08% BAC after three drinks within one hour.
- ⌘ One drink constitutes:
 - 12-oz. can of beer at 5% alcohol content
 - 5-oz. glass of wine at 12% alcohol content
 - 1 ½-oz. shot of 80-proof liquor
 - 12-oz. wine cooler at 5% alcohol content

STOP DWI New York is made up of representatives from every county in the State. This local option, community-based coalition was originally chartered in 1982 (as the STOP-DWI Association) to promote the exchange of new ideas and the development of innovative approaches to decrease the number of alcohol-related crashes on New York's roadways. The organization works with State and Federal officials as well as the private sector to keep New York on the leading edge of developments and strategies that reduce the number of deaths and injuries caused by impaired drivers. The STOP DWI Foundation was established in 2000 to further educate the public on issues of drinking and driving.

STOP DWI New York also coordinates regional and statewide initiatives to combat drunk driving through a combination of increased enforcement, prosecution, rehabilitation, education and public information. The STOP DWI New York program is funded by fines collected from convicted drunk drivers.

For more information on STOP DWI New York, contact Jim May @ 607-778-2056.