

## OPINION-EDITORIAL

### **PUBLIC EDUCATION WILL SUPPORT ROAD SAFETY**

**By Rich Coleman**  
**Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General**

2010PSSG0064-001397

Nov. 9, 2010

VICTORIA – British Columbia has had Canada’s toughest drinking-driving penalties for almost two months, and it is timely for the Province to examine the new rules to ensure they are working effectively.

I think most British Columbians share the same objective – we want people to make good choices, and we want safer roads. We also want a fair system that the public supports, so we committed to look at the results of our approach.

What has become increasingly clear is the need for more public education, so that British Columbians can make well-informed, responsible decisions, and for police to consider the discretion available to them around impounding vehicles.

People need to know that they are able to legally drive their vehicles if they drink small amounts of alcohol over time. Most people can still enjoy a glass of wine with dinner or a beer after work.

This is entirely consistent with the 0.05 per cent blood-alcohol content (BAC) threshold, which has been in place in B.C. since 1977. Only the penalties have changed. Before Sept. 20, police were imposing 24-hour driver’s licence suspensions at the roadside on any driver tested with a 0.05 breath sample. The driver’s vehicle could also be impounded for 24 hours, at an officer’s discretion.

Why did we get tougher on drivers at the 0.05 threshold? One of the reasons was that police were handing out 30,000 to 40,000 of the 24-hour suspensions to those in the “warn” range each year. With those kinds of numbers, we knew that changes needed to be made.

But one effect of those changes is that the new penalties are causing many responsible people – people who are not a threat to road safety – to err on the side of extreme caution.

A number of tools, including online calculators and personal blood-alcohol readers, are available that help people make informed decisions about when they are safe and legal to drive. In the coming weeks, the Province will be examining the value of these tools in supporting our efforts to improve road safety. We will also look into how more public education can continue to support responsible drivers in making safe decisions when they go out for a meal or celebrate with friends.

Our educational efforts will extend to police officers at the roadside. The fact is, they have discretion over whether or not to impound the vehicle of someone who's caught once or twice in the "warn" range of 0.05 to 0.08 per cent BAC. There's still the option of parking a vehicle, if it is safe to do so, or allowing a sober passenger or friend to get a vehicle home.

Still, I'm concerned about the number of tows, which is far higher than we anticipated. So, I've discussed with law enforcement leaders the need to reinforce the "discretion" message with officers, and committed to strengthening police training about the new rules.

We know the public supports our efforts to keep dangerous drivers from killing and injuring people on B.C.'s roads. What we're committing to now is further education, consultation with the public, the hospitality industry, police and others, and a willingness to revisit the legislation next spring, if necessary.

The law can't work for our Province if it's based on widespread and unreasonable fear. The new rules, and their enforcement, must be understood and accepted by the public – and we intend to work quickly to ensure they are.

-30-

Media Contact:  
Media Relations  
Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General  
250 356-6961

For more information on government services or to subscribe to the Province's news feeds using RSS, visit the Province's website at [www.gov.bc.ca](http://www.gov.bc.ca).