



UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA MEDIA RELEASE

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BC's drinking and driving laws mean fewer deaths

Significantly fewer people are dying in alcohol-related crashes in British Columbia, thanks to the province's new drinking and driving laws. A new study by the University of Victoria's Centre for Addictions Research of BC ([CARBC](#)), released online today, indicates the number of fatal alcohol-related collisions has decreased by more than 40 per cent under the new law.

The [Immediate Roadside Prohibition](#) (IRP) legislation was passed in 2010 to help police and the courts more effectively process drinking drivers and increase the likelihood of apprehension and punishment. The legislation largely replaced laws under the Criminal Code of Canada, which had more severe penalties but also lower probability of punishment.

"It's clear the Immediate Roadside Prohibition legislation saves lives," says Scott Macdonald, CARBC assistant director. "Our findings suggest every province and territory in Canada should have its own legislation regarding drinking and driving."

Macdonald and his team of researchers from CARBC and the University of British Columbia worked with the Government of BC to conduct a third-party evaluation of the impact of the legislation by examining three types of outcomes from alcohol-related collisions—fatalities, injuries and property damage. The study compares statistics from the 15-year period before and two-year period after the implementation of the legislation.

"These results demonstrate that our approach to reducing the amount of alcohol-related injuries and fatalities on our roads is working," says Suzanne Anton, Attorney General and Minister of Justice. "To date, an estimated 104 lives have been saved since B.C.'s impaired driving law came into effect in 2010. At its heart, this program is about keeping our roads safe so drivers can get home to their families."

Along with the 40 per cent reduction in fatalities from alcohol-related crashes, they found significant declines for injuries (23 per cent) and property damage (19.5 per cent).

The CARBC study, "The Impact on Alcohol-Related Collisions of the Partial Decriminalization of Impaired Driving in British Columbia" is available online in the peer-reviewed academic journal *Accident Analysis and Prevention*.

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BACKGROUND

What community leaders are saying

Those whose business it is to deal with drinking drivers are praising the CARBC study:

Andrew Murie, Chief Executive Officer of MADD Canada

“Anecdotally, MADD knew that the new BC laws on drinking and driving were working but, until the Centre for Addictions Research of BC completed this detailed study, there was no empirical proof of the laws’ effectiveness. Now that CARBC has shown how well the Immediate Roadside Prohibition can work in Canada, I think there will be a global rethink on the way countries deal with drinking and driving. In fact, once BC figures out its legal challenges surrounding the legislation, I think the IRP will become the golden template. You’ll almost be criticized if you don’t do it.”

Jamie Graham, Chief Constable of Victoria Police

“It’s clear that just telling people they shouldn’t be drinking and driving is not enough. There has to be a strong deterrent to stop people. This new study by the Centre for Addictions Research of BC clearly shows that BC’s new drinking and driving legislation is not only a deterrent, but also a lifesaver. The study confirms that we are on the right track to making BC one of the safest places to drive in Canada.”

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BACKGROUND

BC's drinking and driving laws

Under the Criminal Code of Canada, it is a criminal offence to drive while impaired by alcohol with a Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) of 80mg/100ml (0.08) or greater, or to refuse a breath test. In addition, driving at BACs of 50mg/100ml is against the law in BC and most provinces under provincial legislation.

Enforcement of laws under the Criminal Code of Canada is time consuming and expensive for both the police and courts. Collecting evidence by police requires sophisticated breath-testing equipment housed at a police station, along with considerable paperwork. A single charge for driving while impaired by alcohol under the criminal code takes police an average of 2 hours 48 minutes to process and four hours of police time in court if the case goes to trial.

In response, most Canadian provinces and territories have enacted administrative sanctions for drivers with BAC levels between 40-80mg/100ml.

British Columbia introduced its [Immediate Roadside Prohibition](#) (IRP) legislation in 2010 hoping to deter drinking drivers by increasing the certainty, severity and swiftness of sanctions.

The legislation was criticized for the power it gives police to apprehend drinking drivers without giving drivers the same safeguards provided under the Criminal Code. In November 2011, the BC Supreme Court upheld the Province's right to pass the legislation, but ruled parts of the law infringed the Charter. As a result, the Province enacted changes to enhance fairness at the roadside and in the review process. For example, police must tell drivers they have the right to a second breath test on a second approved screening device, with the lower of the two readings prevailing.

The study by the University of Victoria's Centre for Addictions Research of BC ([CARBC](#)) shows that BC's legislation has had a major effect on alcohol-related collisions—a 40.4 per cent reduction in fatalities, 23.4 per cent decrease in injury collisions and 19.5 per cent decrease in property damage collisions. The researchers conclude that the IRP and associated publicity has been more effective for minimizing alcohol-related collisions than laws under the Canadian Criminal Code.

The CARBC study, "The Impact on Alcohol-Related Collisions of the Partial Decriminalization of Impaired Driving in British Columbia" is available online in the peer-reviewed academic journal *Accident Analysis and Prevention*. It is co-authored by: CARBC's Drs. Scott Macdonald, Jinhui Zhao, Gina Martin, and Tim Stockwell; the University of British Columbia's (Department of Emergency Medicine) Drs. Jeff Brubacher and Herbert Chan; and the BC Ministry of Justice's (Superintendent of Motor Vehicles) Mr. Neil Arason and Ms. Susanne Steinmetz.

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Figure 1. Monthly alcohol-related fatal collision rate per 1,000,000 licensed drivers in BC, 1996-2012

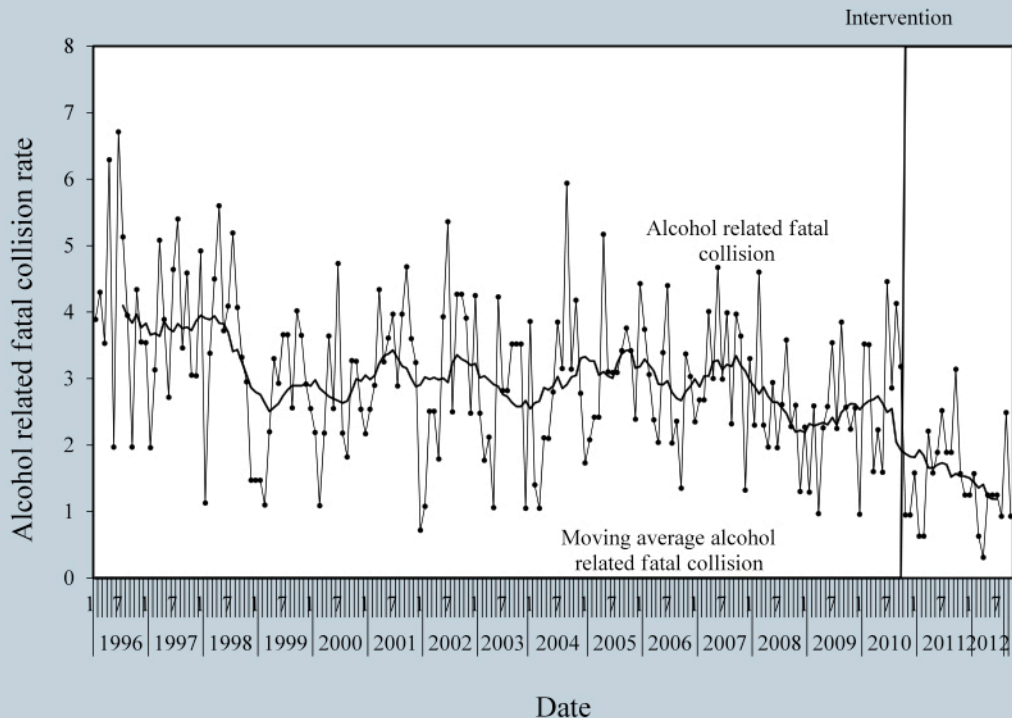


Figure 2. Monthly alcohol-related injured collision rate per 1,000,000 licensed drivers in BC, 1996-2012

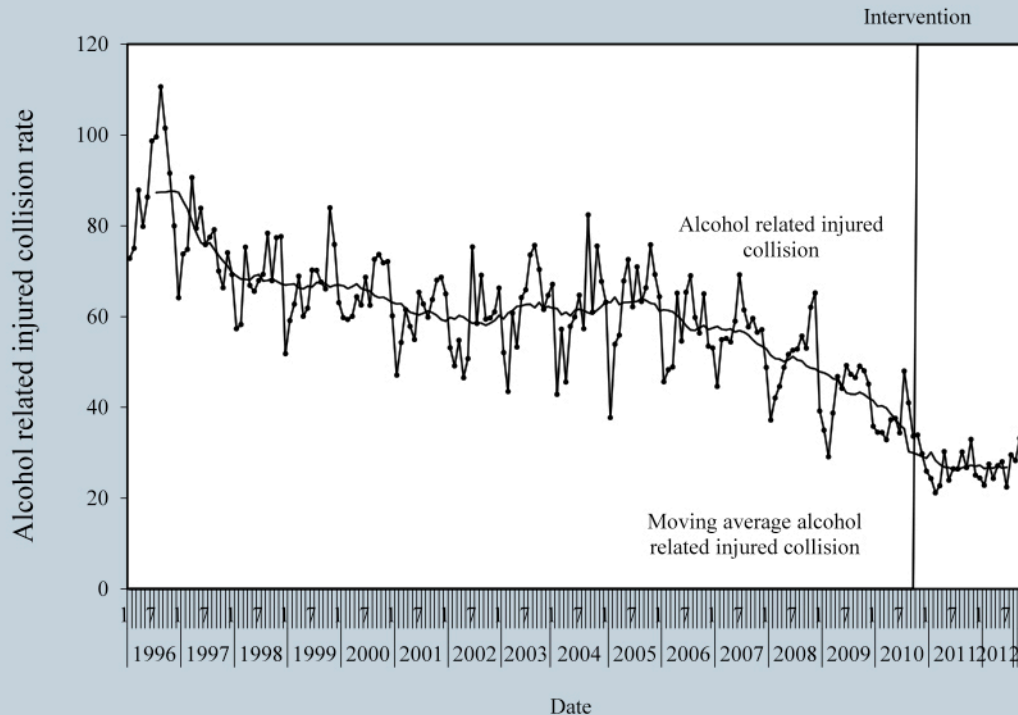


Figure 3. Monthly alcohol-related property damage only collision rate per 1,000,000 licensed drivers in BC, 1996-2012

