

Drink driving – decline in detection and prosecution but not incidence

Key points

- Drink drive testing is decreasing—down 29% from 2010, and 14% in the past year
- Best practice would see 18 times as many drivers breath tested each year
- Less than half of car drives in casualty collisions in England were breath tested last year
- But incidence of (self-reported) drink driving is on the rise

RoadPeace calls

Drink drivers should face a greater risk of being caught. This includes:

- Testing of all drivers involved in fatal and serious injury collisions, if not all casualty collisions, to be obligatory. This is a key call of RoadPeace’s Collision Investigation campaign.
- Drink driving made a notifiable offence by the Home Office and prioritised by the police.

Introduction

Deterrence depends largely on the perceived risk of detection. As shown in this briefing, the risk of detection is on the decrease in England and Wales.

Drink driving and breath tests

The European Transport Safety Council (ETSC), an independent think tank dedicated to reducing road deaths and injuries in Europe, recommends one in five motorists checked each year for drink driving.(ETSC, 2016). With over 45 million licensed drivers in Britain, and only 520 thousand breath tests, as few as 1 in 87 drivers were breath tested in 2015.

Table 1 Breath tests and breath test failures by drivers involved in reported casualty collisions, 2011-15

Number	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	change since	
							2010	2014
Breath tests	736,846	685,992	686,346	676,353	606,241	520,219	-29%	-14%
Positive/refused tests	84,436	80,761	76,179	70,675	65,585	60,019	-29%	-8%
Positive/refused (%)	11%	12%	11%	10%	11%	12%	---	---

Source: DfT (2016) RAS51002

Police are evaluated on their effectiveness at responding to notifiable crime, as defined by the Home Office. The offence of drink driving does not qualify as notifiable crime. This results in drink driving enforcement being a low priority for police.

After a casualty collision—breath-testing of car drivers

Since April 1996, the Association of Chief Police Officers in England and Wales have had a policy of breath testing all drivers involved in road collisions, in which the police attend or deal with. This was not restricted to injury collisions. (DfT,2006) But tests are not always possible, e.g. with drivers leaving the scene, or being too seriously injured for a test to be permitted.

As shown in Table 2, with car drivers, breath testing of drivers in injury collisions is on the decrease in England. In 2015, this dropped to below half of car drivers in injury collisions.

Table 2: Car drivers in reported casualty collisions, % breath tested by region, England

Region						change since	
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2011	2014
North East	57%	55%	54%	53%	53%	-7%	-1%
North West	58%	58%	62%	62%	62%	+6%	-1%
Yorkshire and the Humber	48%	50%	49%	51%	50%	+4%	-2%
East Midlands	57%	56%	55%	52%	53%	-7%	+1%
West Midlands	54%	52%	49%	46%	42%	-22%	-8%
East of England	61%	62%	60%	58%	56%	-7%	-3%
London	37%	33%	33%	30%	27%	-27%	-12%
South East	59%	60%	59%	58%	56%	-5%	-2%
South West	63%	61%	59%	57%	56%	-11%	-2%
England	54%	53%	53%	51%	49%	-9%	-4%

Source: DfT (2016), RAS51020

Drink driving court prosecutions

Drink driving is a summary offence and thus tried in the Magistrates Court. It carries a maximum prison sentence of six months but only 2% of drink drivers convicted are imprisoned. Driving bans are supposed to be mandatory, but only 90% of drink drivers convicted are banned, see below.

Table 3: Drink driving prosecutions, 2009-15 England and Wales

Area						change since	
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2011	2014
North East	2,334	2,271	1,999	1,876	1,897	-19%	+1%
North West	6,462	6,441	5,499	5,278	5,095	-21%	-3%
Yorkshire and the Humber	4,246	4,089	3,650	3,478	3,635	-14%	+5%
East Midlands	3,866	3,934	3,532	3,401	3,331	-14%	-2%
West Midlands	5,166	4,968	4,301	4,188	4,277	-17%	+2%
East of England	4,882	4,766	4,350	3,888	3,826	-22%	-2%
London	6,625	5,451	5,423	4,783	4,431	-33%	-7%
South East	7,463	6,876	6,435	5,838	6,074	-19%	+4%
South West	4,539	4,202	4,007	3,541	3,478	-23%	-2%
Wales	3,174	2,843	2,602	2,595	2,619	-17%	+1%
England & Wales	48,757	45,841	41,798	38,866	38,663	-21%	-1%

Source: MoJ, Motoring data tool, 2015, Driving with alcohol in the blood above the prescribed limit

See Appendix Table for details of changes in drink driving prosecutions for police services.

Has drink-driving declined?

Self-reported drink driving data from the ONS Crime Survey for England and Wales, indicate that the percentage of drivers who had driven while over the alcohol limit increased in the previous year.

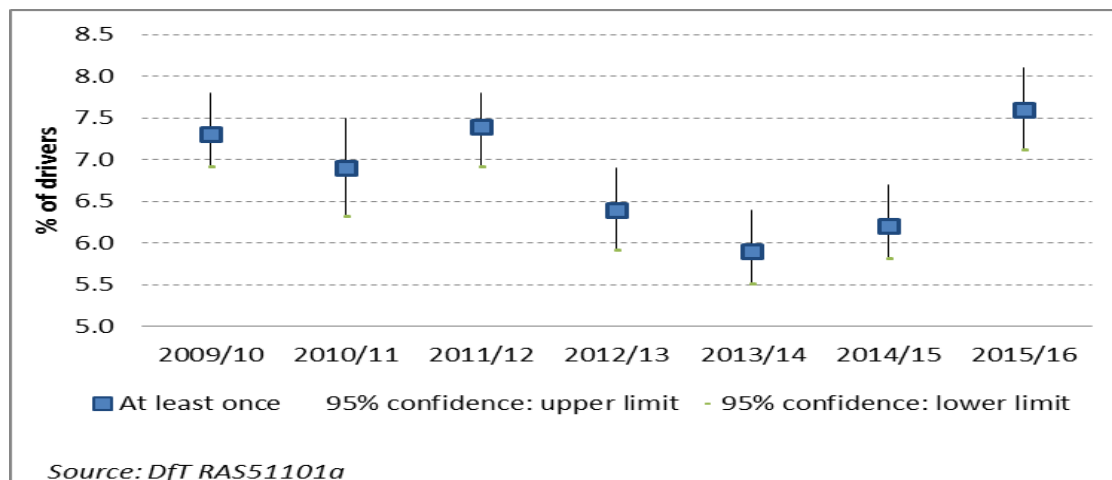


Figure 1 Self-reported drink driving

About RoadPeace

RoadPeace, the national charity for road crash victims, has been helping the families cope with the aftermath of road death and injury since 1992. We provide emotional support and information to help the bereaved and injured understand the justice system. RoadPeace also campaigns for the justice system and for society in general to take road danger more seriously.

In June 2016, we launched a campaign for thorough collision investigations. This includes drink and drug testing of all drivers involved in fatal and serious injury collisions. Impairment testing should not depend on local police priorities and resources.

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Appendix Table 1 Prosecutions for drink-driving by police services

Region/PA	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Change 1 year	Change 5 yrs
North East	1,827	1,652	1,616	1,499	1,354	1,427	+5%	-22%
Cleveland	447	354	373	357	339	320	-6%	-28%
Durham	461	409	374	328	329	365	+11%	-21%
Northumbria	919	889	869	814	686	742	+7%	-19%
North West	5,179	4,730	4,741	4,103	3,848	3,731	-3%	-28%
Cheshire	857	848	855	639	782	663	-15%	-23%
Cumbria	345	324	354	311	307	266	-13%	-23%
Greater Manchester	1,885	1,658	1,817	1,569	1,273	1,288	+1%	-32%
Lancashire	1,193	1,066	957	902	837	896	+7%	-25%
Merseyside	899	834	758	682	649	618	-5%	-31%
Yorkshire and The Humber	3,379	3,077	2,978	2,699	2,578	2,665	+3%	-21%
Humberside	601	572	539	486	499	370	-26%	-38%
North Yorkshire	614	548	558	509	457	551	+18%	-10%
South Yorkshire	786	760	641	603	651	645	-1%	-18%
West Yorkshire	1,378	1,197	1,240	1,101	971	1,099	+12%	-20%
East Midlands	2,943	2,749	2,900	2,626	2,558	2,415	-6%	-18%
Derbyshire	568	535	590	464	468	478	+2%	-16%
Leicestershire	651	606	547	534	482	403	-16%	-38%
Lincolnshire	544	527	568	550	551	541	-2%	-1%
Northamptonshire	474	454	482	433	436	396	-9%	-16%
Nottinghamshire	706	627	713	645	621	597	-4%	-15%
West Midlands	3,789	3,899	3,731	3,260	3,228	3,259	+1%	-14%
Staffordshire	713	749	732	645	681	712	+5%	0%
Warwickshire	425	318	349	362	291	379	+24%	-11%
West Mercia	991	992	1,029	940	902	839	-7%	-15%
West Midlands	1,660	1,840	1,621	1,313	1,354	1,329	-2%	-20%
East of England	4,122	3,757	3,670	3,350	3,045	2,994	-2%	-27%
Bedfordshire	461	422	407	322	310	305	-2%	-34%
Cambridgeshire	596	538	515	493	381	369	-3%	-38%
Essex	1,137	1,004	773	907	775	720	-7%	-37%
Hertfordshire	951	830	826	668	680	578	-15%	-39%
Norfolk	533	484	616	497	472	580	+22%	+9%
Suffolk	444	479	533	463	427	442	+3%	0%
London	5,711	4,983	4,132	4,210	3,719	3,377	-9%	-41%
City of London	91	105	0	0	0	0	N/A	N/A
Metropolitan	5,620	4,878	4,132	4,210	3,719	3,377	-9%	-40%
South East	5,751	5,609	5,206	4,877	4,385	4,590	+4%	-20%
Hampshire	1,449	1,336	1,133	1,066	977	1,075	+9%	-26%
Kent	1,117	1,105	914	894	803	786	-2%	-30%
Surrey	673	705	748	707	572	596	+3%	-11%
Sussex	1,069	999	964	829	748	848	+12%	-21%
Thames Valley	1,443	1,464	1,447	1,381	1,285	1,285	0%	-11%
South West	3,557	3,595	3,313	3,205	2,814	2,734	-3%	-23%
Avon and Somerset	1,020	1,047	1,015	932	833	771	-7%	-24%
Devon and Cornwall	1,238	1,201	1,144	1,027	886	959	+7%	-23%
Dorset	478	511	425	504	427	366	-14%	-23%
Gloucestershire	421	431	313	327	318	327	+3%	-22%
Wiltshire	400	405	416	415	350	311	-11%	-22%
Wales	2,414	2,389	2,167	2,011	1,994	1,999	+0%	-17%
Dyfed-Powys	418	401	426	362	338	348	+3%	-17%
Gwent	352	444	380	341	308	304	-1%	-14%
North Wales	581	465	518	485	494	460	-7%	-21%
South Wales	1,063	1,079	843	823	854	887	+4%	-17%
Grand Total	38,672	36,440	34,454	31,840	29,523	29,191	-1%	-25%