



**Department of Health & Social Services  
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities  
Department of Public Safety**

## **JOINT NEWS RELEASE**

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## **Alaska's impaired driving rates improve; still a problem**

*Several initiatives likely reduced rates of driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol*

(Anchorage, AK) — Alaska was one of a dozen states that saw a significant drop in drunk driving, and one of seven with a significant drop in drugged driving, according to national survey data from 2002–2005 and 2006–2009. While national rates also fell, impaired driving is pervasive and deadly, and whittling away at the problem continues to be a national and state priority.

The federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) on Thursday released a report “State Estimates of Drunk and Drugged Driving” that compared combined survey data from 2002–2005 and 2006–2009:

<http://oas.samhsa.gov/2k10/205/DruggedDriving.cfm>.

In an average year, 30 million Americans drive drunk and 10 million drive drugged, according to the SAMHSA report. A third of all traffic-related deaths in 2008 — nearly 12,000 deaths nationwide — were the result of alcohol-related crashes; 18 percent of motor vehicle driver deaths involved drugs, including misused prescription drugs.

In Alaska, the rate of alcohol-related traffic fatalities has held steady from 2003 to 2009 at around 40 percent. Alcohol is the top contributing factor to crashes in terms of driver behavior.

“In Alaska we’ve addressed these challenges on several fronts, and we’re apparently seeing our efforts pay off,” said Melissa Witzler Stone, director of the Division of Behavioral Health, Department of Health and Social Services. Prevention efforts include court programs that send first-time offenders to treatment programs, an 18-month therapeutic court program for repeat DUI offenders, mandatory breath-alcohol-content ignition locks for all DUI offenders; graduated licenses for teen drivers, and increased enforcement around holidays.

While cause-and-effect of programs is difficult to establish, the SAMHSA report shows progress in reducing the number of drivers who choose to drive while impaired.

The rate of drunk driving among Alaskans 16 or older dropped to 11.1 percent in the survey period, down from 14.8 percent. The rate of drugged driving fell to 4.3 percent from 6.8 percent. Both changes are statistically significant. Alaska's rates for both categories of impaired driving are in the middle of national rankings.

The report also found statistically significant drops in national rates of drunk driving (to 13.2 percent from 14.6 percent) and drugged driving (to 4.3 percent from 4.8 percent).

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