

What are some of the problems we face on the roads? What laws could be changed to accomplish that goal? How can you contribute to improving road safety?

Drugged Driving: A Growing Epidemic

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Driving under the influence is a national crisis. In 2010, there were almost 300,000 cases of impaired driving per day in the United States (“Alcoholism and DUIs - Black Bear Lodge”). This type of behavior consumes the lives of the victims and their families. Sadly, driving under the influence isn’t just a U.S. specific problem, as The *Foundation for Alcohol Responsibility* found that globally, there were an estimated 375,000 individuals killed in alcohol-related accidents in 2017 alone. Intoxicated drivers are one of the biggest dangers a driver has on the road, but there is a bigger threat to drivers that have become more and more prevalent --- drugged driving.

Defined by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, drugged driving is the act of driving while under any higher level substance such as methamphetamine, heroin, or cocaine. This is an epidemic in many parts of the country as in 2018, over 12.6 million individuals were caught driving under the influence of illicit drugs (National Institute on Drug Abuse). These drivers are extremely dangerous as hard drugs, like heroin, are already impairing, but the lack of awareness and detection allows them to fly under our radar. The Sydney National Drug and Alcohol Research Center expands on this by noting that in a study of 300 injecting drug users, only 41% believed they could get caught drugged driving. This is worrying as the participants viewed harder substances as significantly less impairing than alcohol. This desensitization is the reason why over 87% of them drove impaired within the past 12 months. Without proper societal awareness and an ability to accurately assess who is drugged driving, our roads will become far more lethal.

Law Enforcement needs to be more effective in detecting drugged drivers. One of the most effective ways of suppressing drunk drivers is by utilizing checkpoints and breathalyzing suspects. However, detecting drugged drivers is extremely difficult since harder substances cannot be breathalyzed. Thankfully, *Labcorp*, a medical testing center, states that instant-detection kits are already being developed by its facilities (“Rapid Tests | Labcorp”). This would involve both urine and blood tests which can detect if the suspect is on any sort of hard drug within minutes. The expansion in production and distribution of these products would greatly decrease drugged driving as Yung-Hsiang Ying, a professor at the National Taiwan Normal University, finalizes that when effective detection methods were utilized by local police, DUI’s decreased by 22%.

Society needs to raise awareness towards drugged driving. For example, drunk driving has been shown to decrease when individuals are exposed to prevention mechanisms (Olson and Gerstein). Though, a major problem throughout the legal system is that we do not portray drugged driving the same way as drunk driving. By simply implementing drugged driving prevention media alongside drunk driving slogans, we can effectively spread awareness for the activity, decreasing it in the process.

Works Cited

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