

Briefing: Lowering the drink driving limit in England and Wales

Summary

- **Drink driving deaths have not fallen since 2010**, with 240 deaths and more than 8,000 casualties each year
- **England and Wales have one of the highest legal limits in the world**; higher than Scotland, the rest of Europe, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa
- **Reducing the legal limit to 50mg alcohol per 100ml blood would save at least 25 lives per year**
- **British Social Attitudes Survey shows 77% support a lower legal limit.** Road safety charities, emergency services and motoring associations call on MPs to take action

The current drink driving limit

In England and Wales, the drink-drive limit is set at 80mg alcohol/100ml blood and has been since 1965. **Drivers who drink up to this limit are six times more likely to be killed in an accident as drivers who have not consumed alcohol.**

This limit is high by international standards. Commonwealth countries like Australia, New Zealand and South Africa all set their drink driving limit at 50mg and all other European countries (except Malta) have limits of 50mg or lower. Scotland lowered its limit to 50mg in December 2014, and police figures showed a 12.5% decrease in drink-drive offences in the first nine months.¹ Northern Ireland is set to lower its drink driving limit in 2016. The Government of Malta recently announced plans to lower the drink drive limit to 50mg this month in a new National Alcohol Policy to reduce harm.²

Costs

The cost of UK drink driving accidents and casualties is **£800 million per year.**³ This does not include the 40% of fatal accidents where people have alcohol within their system, but are below the 80mg limit.⁴

Deaths and injuries

While there have been significant improvements in UK road safety over the last 20 years, **the number of drink driving deaths has flatlined since 2010. Drink driving leads to 240 deaths and more than 8,000 casualties each year.**

The Department for Transport calculate that **60% of those who are killed or injured in reported drink driving incidents are people other than the driver**, such as passengers, other road users or pedestrians.⁵

Offenders

Men account for 78% for all drink drivers, and just under half of all drink drivers are men under 34. But attitudes towards drink driving are softening: **nearly a third of drivers that drink admit to driving when over the legal alcohol limit**, which equates to just over 10 million people.⁶ As happened in Scotland, lowering the limit would provide an evidenced and cost-effective focal point for raising awareness of the dangers of drink driving.

Evidence shows a lower drink-drive limit would save lives

Lowering the limit would improve road safety and save a minimum of 25 deaths and 95 serious casualties each year.⁷ It would also save money and free up the emergency services to deal with other issues.

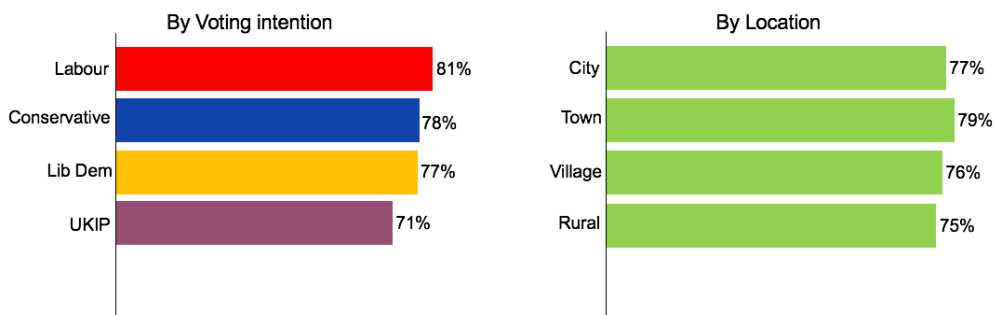
There is strong international evidence that reducing the limit to 50mg,⁸ combined with visible enforcement, tough penalties and mass media campaigns will reduce drink driving.

There is wide ranging support for a lower limit

A Private Member’s Bill, sponsored by Lord Brooke of Alverthorpe, to reduce the drink driving limit in England and Wales recently passed through the House of Lords in July 2016.

There is strong public support: The latest British Social Attitudes Survey showed 77% of people are in favour of lowering the drink-drive limit.⁹

Overall 77% of the population support a lower drink drive limit



Source: Alcohol Health Alliance, national polling (2015)

There is a broad coalition of groups campaigning to lower the drink driving limit, including:



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¹ BBC News (29 May 2015) 'Drink-drive offences fall after lower limit introduced'
² Malta National Government (Oct 2016) [Alcohol Policy Document](#)
³ Hansard (5th September 2016) [Driving under Influence: Written question - HL1487](#)
⁴ Department for Transport (2016) 'Proportion of killed drivers/riders resulting from reported accidents by BAC category'
⁵ Department for Transport (2016) 'Estimates for accidents involving illegal alcohol levels: 2014 (final)'
⁶ RIAS (2015) 'Over 10 million drivers get behind the wheel when knowingly over the limit'
⁷ Allsop R, (2015), 'Saving Lives by Lowering the Legal Drink-Drive Limit'. PACTS
⁸ Fell JC and Voas RB. (2006), 'The effectiveness of reducing illegal blood alcohol concentration (BAC) limits for driving: Evidence for lowering the limit to .05 BAC', *Journal of Safety Research*, 37(3)
⁹ 2015 British Social Attitudes Survey (Sep 2016), 'Attitudes to Alcohol: Findings from the 2015 British Social Attitudes Survey'