



Safety Seminar: Impaired Driving

On September 25, 2025, Alliance for Automotive Innovation (Auto Innovators) convened stakeholders from government, industry, academia, and the safety advocacy community for a discussion on drunk and impaired driving. The event included a preview of Auto Innovators' latest impaired driving research, as well as an expert panel that focused on strategies for reducing the number of drunk and impaired driving related crashes and fatalities that occur on US roadways each year.



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Data: According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), 12,429 people died in alcohol-impaired driving crashes in 2023. This represented about one-third of all traffic fatalities that year and continued a decades-long trend where nearly 3 out of 10 deaths on our roads each year involve a drunk driver at or above the legal limit.^{1,2}

¹ [Traffic Safety Facts 2023: A Compilation of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crash Data, NHTSA, DOT HS 813 738, August 2025.](#)

² The legal limit Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) is 0.05% in Utah and 0.08% in other states.

Auto Innovators' Research: Auto Innovators conducted a study of consumer attitudes toward drunk driving and acceptance of in-vehicle technologies to address impaired driving. The research identified several key findings:

- The public recognizes that drunk driving is not acceptable, supporting the conclusion that advocacy efforts to raise awareness of the risks of driving impaired are important and effective.
- Consumers support impaired driving technology - with saving lives, deterring drunk drivers and making roads safer among the top reasons for support.
- Consumer support for the technology decreases as they learn more about the technology, dropping from 87 percent to 76 percent.³ This suggests that more research is needed on how to address consumer concerns, including messaging.
- Policymakers and automakers must maintain a clear understanding of consumer expectations around the performance and reliability of in-vehicle technology, ensuring awareness about consumer concerns and transparency about how they are being addressed.

Key Themes and Takeaways: Panel participants emphasized the need for collaborative engagement to ensure that all elements of a safe system approach to roadway safety are in place – safer vehicles, safer people, safer infrastructure, safer speeds, and improved post-crash care. In particular, panelists highlighted the safer people and safer vehicles pillars. Participants also emphasized the need to create a unified voice around the benefits of in-vehicle technology to address impairment and the urgency of saving lives.

- **Public education and redefining the culture around drunk driving.** The public understands that drunk driving is a problem, but the tolerance in the U.S. for drinking and driving is higher than in many other countries. Penalties in the U.S. for offenders also tend to be lighter than in other countries. While the legal limits are 0.05 or 0.08 BAC, most people are unaware of what those numbers mean—or how they apply to them personally. Studies have shown that perceived or guessed BAC is often inaccurate.⁴ Significant efforts to educate the public and address unsafe assumptions around drinking and driving and the impact of alcohol on driving performance continue. Panelists mentioned resources such as Alcohol 101+ to educate college students on potential risks of alcohol consumption and other resources on Responsibility.org such as the “Virtual Bar”.⁵ Participants asserted that we all share a responsibility for educating consumers about the impact of drunk driving and empowering them to make safer driving choices.

³ Overall support for impaired driving technology fell almost 10 percentage points (87% down to 76%) with strong support dropping from 62% to 36%.

⁴ Kaestle, C. E., Droste, N., Peacock, A., Bruno, R., & Miller, P. (2018). Perception of intoxication in a field study of the night-time economy: Blood alcohol concentration, patron characteristics, and event-level predictors. *Addictive Behaviors*, 76, 195–200.

⁵ See: <https://www.alcohol101.plus/>

- **Enforcement of traffic laws.** Panelists noted that law enforcement plays an obvious and essential role in discouraging drinking and driving. Prioritizing high visibility enforcement and other strategies enumerated in “Countermeasures That Work” are key strategies.⁶ Stakeholder engagement with the law enforcement community helps to raise law enforcement awareness of new technologies to address drunk driving.
- **Addressing drunk driving recidivism.** Panelists expressed concerns about alcohol abuse in society as well as repeat drunk driving offenders. They noted that underlying mental health and substance abuse issues make impaired driving a highly complex problem, with mental health issues sometimes manifesting themselves for the first time when someone enters the legal system because of a drunk driving charge. Screening and assessment tools as well as additional behavioral resources can help prevent drunk driving and recidivism. Significant amounts of supporting research and tools, such as the Computerized Assessment and Referral System (CARS) and Impaired Driving Assessment (IDA), exist and should be more readily used to address mental health comorbidity with impaired driving. While proven approaches exist, including ignition interlock devices and 24/7 sobriety monitoring, they are not uniformly applied across all states. In addition, currently available ignition interlock devices are effective, but often refused by high-risk offenders, even though offenders may drive drunk more than 80 times before being pulled over and around one third are likely to re-offend.^{7,8} Panelists suggested the need to expand and strengthen their use.^{9,10}
- **Continued investment in vehicle technology.** In-vehicle technology can play an important role in addressing drunk driving crashes and fatalities. Vehicle manufacturers are making significant investments in the development of advanced impaired driving technology, but it is important to focus on ensuring that a holistic safe system approach is maintained. To that end, manufacturers have been making substantial progress in advancing the deployment of advanced driver assistance systems and crashworthiness to help reduce the occurrence and severity of all crashes. However, drivers should not misuse these technologies, and they should not be a fallback for unsafe driving behavior. There is a need to identify actionable near-term steps to support the deployment of impaired driving technology.
- **Ensuring accessible alternatives to drinking and driving.** Panelists shared that ride sharing services can help reduce drunk driving crashes by providing alternative means of transportation for people that have been drinking.¹¹ Ridesharing platforms have been collaborating with advocacy organizations to develop partnerships and safety campaigns to increase awareness of their benefits.

⁶ NHTSA Countermeasures that Work: See: <https://www.nhtsa.gov/book/countermeasures/countermeasures-that-work>

⁷ Source: <https://madd.org/ignition-interlocks/>

⁸ *Impact of Compliance-Based Removal Laws on Alcohol-Impaired Driving Recidivism* (GHSA, July 2023)

⁹ Coben JH, Larkin GL. Effectiveness of ignition interlock devices in reducing drunk driving recidivism. *Am J Prev Med.* 1999 Jan;16(1 Suppl):81-7. doi: 10.1016/s0749-3797(98)00117-2. PMID: 9921390.

¹⁰ McCartt, A. T., Solomon, M. G., Nichols, J. L., Tison, J., Chaudhary, N. K., & Wochinger, K. (2023, September). *Evaluation of North Dakota's 24/7 sobriety program* (Report No. DOT HS 813 494). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

¹¹ Anderson, M. L., & Davis, L. W. (2021). *Uber and alcohol-related traffic fatalities* (NBER Working Paper No. 29071). National Bureau of Economic Research. See: <https://doi.org/10.3386/w29071>

- **Policies to support continued innovation.** Panelists emphasized that safety cannot wait. Non-regulatory approaches – such as NHTSA’s New Car Assessment Program (NCAP) and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety’s Top Safety Pick ratings – can help raise public awareness and encourage technology deployment. It is important that the policy environment reflects the current state of innovation and evolves as manufacturers and technology developers continue to innovate.
- **Continued progress on implementation of the HALT Act.** Congress mandated in 2021 that NHTSA develop a Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard to require advanced drunk and impaired driving technology as a standard feature on all new passenger vehicles. However, the Congressional deadline for implementing this new regulation has not been met. Panelists highlighted responsible regulation as a path for facilitating the development and deployment of these potentially lifesaving technologies; however, some noted there were still several outstanding policy questions that need to be addressed by NHTSA.¹² The agency is in the process of analyzing more than 18,000 public comments.¹³
- **Building consumer acceptance.** Although it can take decades for new technologies to fully enter the vehicle fleet, it is important to listen to consumers as technologies to address impaired driving become more commonplace in vehicles. Efforts to build public acceptance should include education on how technologies work to help support safer driving behavior and how any potential concerns or misconceptions are being addressed. Other incentives, such as lower insurance premiums, may help encourage early adopters. Fleet deployments also provide a unique opportunity to support early deployment of advanced drunk driving technology, helping to familiarize consumers with new technology and normalize its adoption outside the work environment.

Conclusion: Significant progress has been made in establishing proven strategies for addressing alcohol-impaired driving. However, drunk driving is still a factor in nearly one-third of all traffic fatalities on U.S. roads. We must do more to redefine the culture in the United States around drunk driving beginning with renewing efforts to enhance public education, expanding high-visibility enforcement, consistently implementing programs proven to reduce repeat offenses, enacting policies that support investments in technology, and ensuring the availability of transportation alternatives so that drivers never feel the need to drink and drive.

¹² NHTSA 2024 Report to Congress on Advanced Impaired Driving Technology (December 2024) See: <https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.gov/files/2024-12/report-to-congress-2024-advanced-impaired-driving-prevention-technology.pdf>

¹³ DOT/NHTSA 2025 Spring Regulatory Agenda. See: <https://www.reginfo.gov/public/do/eAgendaViewRule?pubId=202504&RIN=2127-AM50>