



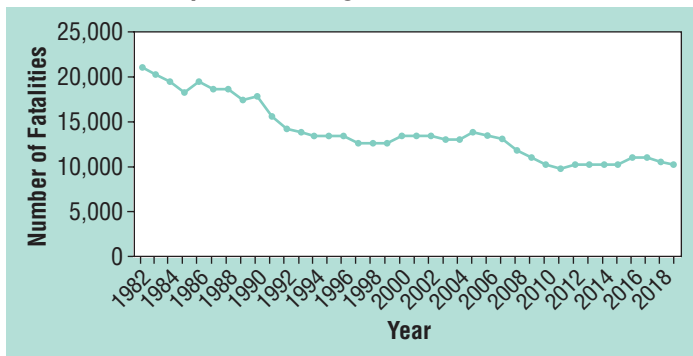
Countermeasures That Work – Alcohol-Impaired Driving

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has published its tenth edition of *Countermeasures That Work* (Venkatraman et al., 2021), a basic reference to assist State Highway Safety Offices and other highway safety professionals in selecting effective, evidence-based countermeasures for traffic safety problem areas. This Traffic Tech highlights the effective alcohol-impaired-driving countermeasures from Chapter 1, Alcohol- and Drug-Impaired Driving.

Background

Alcohol-impaired driving, defined as having a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) at or above .08 g/dL, has declined; however, it remains a traffic priority. In 2019 there were 10,142 people (28%) who died in crashes involving alcohol-impaired drivers of motor vehicle fatalities.

U.S. Alcohol-Impaired Driving Fatalities



Source: FARS (1982–2019), NCSA (2020)

Strategies to Reduce Alcohol-Impaired Driving

The following sections discuss behavioral countermeasures for alcohol impaired driving that have been supported by research as consistently effective across situations (★★★★★), effective in certain situations (★★★★), or promising/likely effective (★★★). For more information on these countermeasures, their effectiveness, cost, use, and time to implement, see the full CTW report. Breath-testing devices and drug-impaired driving are discussed in separate Traffic Techs.

Laws

Countermeasure	Effectiveness	Cost	Use	Time
1.1 Administrative License Revocation or Suspension (ALR/ALS)	★★★★★	\$\$\$	High	Medium
1.2 Open Container	★★★	\$	High	Short
1.3 High-BAC Sanctions	★★★	\$	Medium	Short
1.4 BAC Test Refusal Penalties	★★★	\$	Unknown	Short

Administrative license suspension and license revocation involve immediate driver licensing action when a person fails or refuses a breath test. These laws provide swift and certain penalties. The driver may receive a temporary license and/or may request an administrative hearing review.

Open-container laws prohibit possession of an open alcoholic beverage container, and the consumption of alcohol by motor vehicle drivers or passengers.

High-BAC (e.g., .15 g/dL or higher) **sanctions** involve enhanced penalties for offenders with high BACs. To reduce **BAC test refusals**, some States have stronger penalties for refusing testing than failing testing.

Enforcement

Countermeasure	Effectiveness	Cost	Use	Time
2.1 Publicized Sobriety Checkpoints	★★★★★	\$\$\$	Medium	Short
2.2 High-Visibility Saturation Patrols	★★★★	\$\$	High	Short
2.5 Integrated Enforcement	★★★	\$	Unknown	Short

At **sobriety checkpoints** law enforcement officers randomly stop vehicles for indicators of impairment. In **saturation patrols** officers patrol for impaired drivers. To deter drinking after driving, it is important to publicize these enforcement efforts to increase perceived risk of arrest. For **integrated enforcement** activities directed primarily at other offenses such as speeding or seat belt non-use offer additional opportunities to detect impaired drivers, especially at night, as impaired drivers often speed or fail to wear belts.

Prosecution and Adjudication

Countermeasure	Effectiveness	Cost	Use	Time
3.1 DWI Courts [†]	★★★★	\$\$\$	Low	Medium
3.2 Limits on Diversion & Plea Agreements ^{††}	★★★★	\$	Medium	Short
3.3 Court Monitoring ^{††}	★★★	\$	Low	Short

[†] Proven for reducing recidivism and ^{††} for increasing conviction

DWI courts provide coordinated approaches to prosecuting, sentencing, monitoring, and treating offenders—usually those with prior offenses or high BACs. They focus on accountability.

Diversion programs defer sentencing while offenders participate in education or treatment. Charges may be dropped upon completion, resulting in less severe punishments if the person re-offends. **Limits on diversion and plea agreements**

remove loopholes by putting the charge on offenders' records and reducing pre-trial time and reduce court.

In **court-monitoring** programs, organizations observe and report on court or administrative hearing activities. This can result in higher conviction rates and stiffer sentences.

DWI Treatment, Monitoring, Control

Countermeasure	Effectiveness	Cost	Use	Time
4.1 Alcohol Problem Assessment and Treatment	★★★★★	Varies	High	Varies
4.2 Alcohol Ignition Interlocks [†]	★★★★★	\$\$	Medium	Medium
4.3 Vehicle and License Plate Sanctions [†]	★★★★	Varies	Medium	Medium
4.4 DWI Offender Monitoring [†]	★★★★	\$\$\$	Unknown	Varies
4.5 Lower BAC Limit for Repeat Offenders	★★★★	\$	Low	Short

[†] Proven for reducing recidivism

Alcohol problem assessment and treatment assesses the likelihood of recidivism and address issues through counseling, education, and treatment. This works best with other sanctions and close monitoring.

Alcohol ignition interlocks are installed on offenders' vehicles. They prevent vehicles from starting unless the drivers provide breath samples below a BAC threshold (typically .02 g/dL). They have significantly reduced recidivism while on the offenders' vehicles.

Vehicle and license plate sanctions are intended to prevent DWI offenders from driving. They include special license plates or license plate or vehicle impoundment, immobilization, or forfeiture.

DWI offender monitoring includes intensive supervision, home confinement with electronic monitoring, and dedicated detention facilities.

All States now have an illegal per se BAC limit of .08 g/dL, except for Utah, which has a lower limit of .05. Some States have enacted **lower** (i.e., .02 or .04) **BAC limits for repeat offenders** to emphasize that they should not be driving after drinking.

Prevention, Intervention, Media/Outreach

Countermeasure	Effectiveness	Cost	Use	Time
5.1 Alcohol Screening and Brief intervention	★★★★★	\$\$	Medium	Short
5.2 Mass-Media Campaigns	★★★	\$\$\$	High	Medium
5.4 Alternative Transportation	★★★	\$\$	Unknown	Short



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Alcohol screening and brief interventions can be used in emergency rooms, primary care visits, or social service settings. A few questions help assess people's alcohol-related use, and may lead to a referral to treatment.

Mass-media campaigns consist of intensive communication and outreach activities using radio, television, print, social or other strategies. They may be paid or earned. Campaigns can promote a deterrence or prevention measure, urge people to engage in or avoid certain behaviors, and educate about impaired-driving risks.

Alternative transportation includes options to avoid driving after events where drinking occurred. These may be for-profit or nonprofit ride service programs that are accessed on holidays or as the services are available.

Underage Drinking and Drinking Driving

Countermeasure	Effectiveness	Cost	Use	Time
6.1 Minimum Drinking Age 21 Laws	★★★★★	\$\$\$	High	Low
6.2 Zero-Tolerance Law Enforcement	★★★	\$	Unknown	Short
6.3 Alcohol Vendor Compliance Checks [†]	★★★	\$\$	Unknown	Short
6.4 Other Minimum Legal Drinking Age 21 Law Enforcement	★★★	\$\$	Varies	Varies

[†] Proven for reducing sales to underage people

There is strong evidence that minimum drinking age 21 laws reduce drinking, driving after drinking, and alcohol-impaired crashes and injuries among youth. Zero tolerance laws set a maximum BAC of .02 or less for drivers under 21 years old. Alcohol vendor compliance checks involve law enforcement checks on sellers to ensure they are checking IDs. In a compliance check or "sting," officers watch as underage people attempt to purchase alcohol, and cite the vendor if a sale is made.

Reference

Venkatraman, V., Richard, C. M., Magee, K., & Johnson, K. (2021, July). *Countermeasures that work: A highway safety countermeasures guide for State Highway Safety Offices*, 10th edition, 2020 (Report No. DOT HS 813 097). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.gov/files/2021-09/15100_Countermeasures10th_080621_v5_tag.pdf

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