

PRESS RELEASE

“TIME TO GIVE THE PUBLIC WHAT THEY WANT”: NORTH PROPOSES CRACK DOWN ON DRINK AND DRUG DRIVING

In the first major review of drink and drug driving law since 1976, Sir Peter North recommends that the drink drive limit is reduced from 80mg/100ml to 50mg/100ml and that there should be a step-by-step assault on drug-driving.

Drawing on comprehensive new research commissioned from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE), Sir Peter estimates that tens, perhaps even hundreds, of lives could be saved annually by reducing the blood alcohol limit to 50 mg/100ml, to say nothing of the possibly thousands of injuries that would be avoided. NICE's high-end estimates suggest that as many as 168 lives - approximately 7% of current road deaths in Great Britain – could be saved in the first year of a reduced limit, rising to as many as 303 lives saved by the 6th year following any change in the law. Sir Peter also recommends maintaining the current 12-month mandatory driving ban at the lower limit.

Tasked to independently review both drink and drug driving law, Sir Peter makes 51 recommendations to the Secretary of State for Transport in a bid to reduce drink and drug driving casualties. The most recent statistics showed 430 drink drive deaths and 60 reported drug drive deaths in 2008, but the report stresses that many others are dying as a result of crashes involving drivers impaired by alcohol but below the current limit.

While supportive of the Government's don't-drink-and-drive message, Sir Peter is keen to emphasise that a 50mg/100ml limit isn't zero - a driver could still have a drink without infringing the limit. While the Review has identified that many people don't know how much they could actually drink and stay within the legal limit – old or new – differences in people's response to alcohol makes setting drink 'quotas' a difficult, and possibly, risky strategy. Although keen not to damage Britain's already fragile country pub industry, Sir Peter said:

“Research conclusively shows the much higher risk posed by drink driving. With a blood alcohol level between my proposed new limit of 50mg/100ml and the current 80mg/100ml limit, a driver has a 6 times greater risk of road death than a non-drinking driver. Having considered the issues carefully and considered views from all quarters, I not only believe that it is right to reduce the limit, but that the public is ready for a lower limit. It is time to give them what they want.

”Surveys also tell us that the public is in favour of lengthy bans for drink drivers and witnesses have told me that the current ban is the major deterrent to drink driving. I am therefore clear that the 12-month ban needs to be maintained at a 50 mg/100ml limit.”

As part of a wider crackdown on drink driving, Sir Peter also recommends that police be given greater powers to check for drink drivers and that drink drive procedures are streamlined, to increase police time on the roads. However, he decides against specifically targeting young people or professional drivers.

The Review also assesses Great Britain's less well-understood drug driving problem, challenging the lack of reliable statistics, out-dated research and police emphasis on drink driving detection. In the short term, Sir Peter recommends that police procedures enforcing current drug driving laws are improved, making it more straightforward for police to identify and prosecute drug drivers by allowing nurses, as well as doctors, to authorise blood tests of suspects. Medium-term, he recommends early approval of saliva testing of drug driving suspects in police stations, which will largely overcome the environmental problems in roadside use that had previously slowed technological development of so-called 'drugalysers'.

On the question of a new law setting banned drug levels, Sir Peter was keen to say:

"The focus should be on public safety. Any new offence should therefore focus on establishing levels of drugs in the blood at which significant impairment – and therefore, risk to public safety – can be reasonably assumed, as is the case now for drink-driving".

Responding to concerns from patients and healthcare professionals that people taking medicines would be banned from driving, Sir Peter stresses that this is not his intention. Instead, he highlights that although medicines can be as impairing to driving as illegal drugs, there is an important opportunity for the relevant parties to work together to improve public awareness and the driving patient's safety.

Notes for editors

1. Sir Peter North was asked by the then Secretary of State for Transport, Lord Adonis, in December 2009 to review the law on drink and drug driving.
Link to: Terms of Reference: [Study into the legislative regime for drink and drug driving](#)
Link to: Written Ministerial Statement [House of Commons Hansard Ministerial Statements for 03 Dec 2009 \(pt 0001\)](#)
2. The Review considered evidence from a wide variety of sources which included oral evidence sessions and written submissions from a wide variety of stakeholders. These included organisations and individuals, both Governmental and non-Governmental, with an interest in motoring, passenger transport, road safety, criminal justice, drinks and hospitality industry, health and youth advocacy. The Review considered the scientific research available including research specially commissioned for the purpose of the Review and took the advice of international experts in the field of driver impairment. The Review Team also made a number of visits

to the police, courts and a toxicology laboratory. The details of evidence considered are listed in the full report.

3. Sir Peter provided initial advice to Lord Adonis on 29th March 2010 and a full report to the new Secretary of State, Philip Hammond MP on 21 May 2010.
4. The full report is available at: [Report of the Review of Drink and Drug Driving Law](#)
5. Press enquiries should be directed to the Review Team:
 - email: NorthReview@dft.gsi.gov.uk
 - 'phone: 020 7944 4782
6. An AA/Populus Panel survey in 2008 of more than 17,000 AA members found 66% in favour of lowering the drink drive limit, with only one-fifth (20%) opposed. A survey by Brake and Direct Line of 800 drivers also found 71% supporting the reduction of the current limit. 55% of those in the Brake/Direct Line survey supported a zero limit.
7. The AA Populus Panel (2010) found 64% of more than 20,000 AA members in favour of a 12 month ban or longer for breaking a 50 mg/100ml limit. The British Social Attitudes Survey of 2009 cites 71% of people polled favouring a period of 5 years disqualification for drink-drive offences.