

## **Background Information: Drink and Driving in Ireland**

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### **Drink Driving Measures in Ireland<sup>1</sup>**

#### **Background**

The Irish government in its five year road safety strategy (1998-2002) set a target to reduce the number of fatal road accidents associated with alcohol by 20% (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 1998). However, only half that target (10.4%) was achieved by 2002. In 2002 and 2003, following the introduction of a penalty point system (speed and other offences but not alcohol) there were significant reductions in total road deaths, 8.5% and 10.9% respectively (Department of Transport, 2004). However, in 2004 road deaths increased by 11.6% and by a further 5.9% in 2005. The rise in road deaths would suggest that the deterrence of the penalty point system had worn-off among the driving public.

#### **Mandatory breath testing**

A Strategic Task Force on Alcohol report in 2002 recommended the introduction of random breath testing, given the strong research evidence of effectiveness (DOHC, 2002). The recommendation was parked until the number of road deaths started to increase again in 2004. Random breath testing was again debated and became a controversial political issue which was given extensive media coverage. The drink driving area has been fraught with difficulties with legal challenges to its existing legislation (Department of Transport, 2004). Clarification was sought from the Attorney General by the government regarding the legality of random breath testing. The final outcome, announced in early 2006, was the introduction of mandatory alcohol testing. This means that "*Gardai (police) can establish road checkpoints for random breath testing at which all drivers will be required to submit to a preliminary test*" (Department of Transport, 2006).

#### **Effectiveness of mandatory alcohol testing**

Since the introduction of Mandatory Alcohol Testing (MAT) on 21 July 2006 fewer road deaths have been recorded for every month, with one exception (Figure 1). In the eleven months since MAT there have been 80 fewer road deaths recorded (from 354 down to 274); this represents a 23% reduction ([www.rsa.ie](http://www.rsa.ie)). The Chief Executive of the Road Safety Authority indicated that "*it is clear that Mandatory Alcohol Testing has contributed significantly to the number of lives saved – along with high profile awareness campaigns and a greater Garda presence on the roads*". An analysis by the Road Safety Authority reported that the prevention of 80 road deaths resulted in a financial savings of €176 million, based on previously published cost calculation methodology. The authority also suggested that 600 serious injuries have

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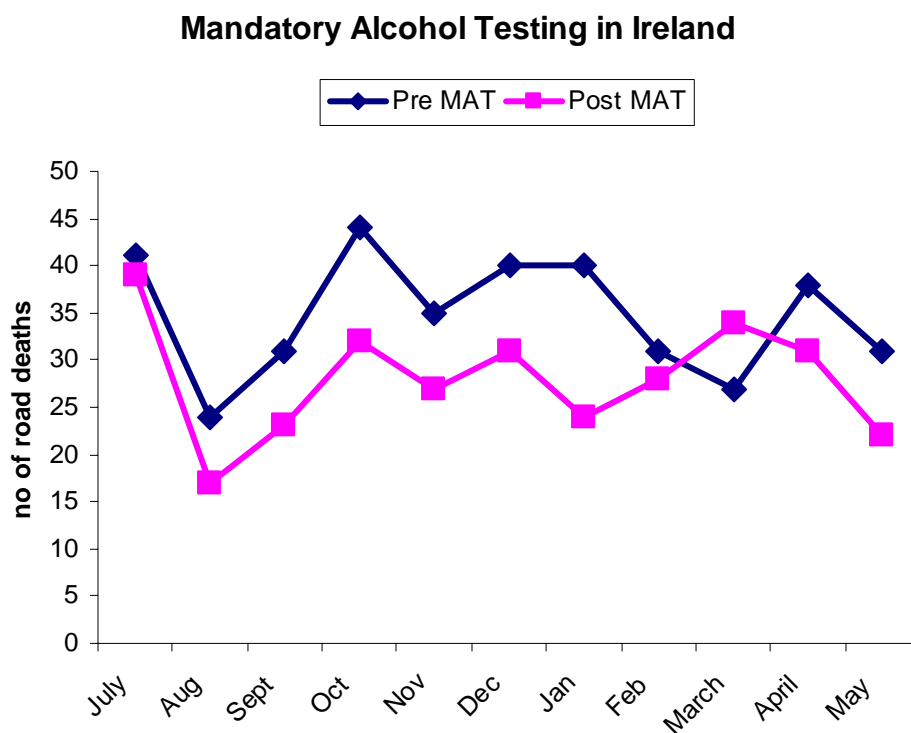
<sup>1</sup> Prepared by Dr. Ann Hope, Trinity College, Dublin. 13/6/07

been prevented over the same period using an estimate, an average of 8 serious injuries for every 1 fatality on Irish roads.

### Education campaigns

Throughout the entire time-period major media, awareness and education campaigns were organised each year by the National Safety Council. However, there was no evidence of a link to the changes in road fatal accidents. Throughout the time- period road deaths decreased, increased and decreased again. The decreases in road deaths were linked to the introduction of the penalty points system (2002, 2003) and to the introduction of mandatory alcohol testing (2006).

Figure 1



### References

Department of the Environment and Local Government. (1998). The road to safety: Government strategy for Road safety 1998-2002. Department of the Environment and local Government, Dublin, Ireland.

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Department of Transport (2004). Road Safety Strategy 2004-2006. Dublin: Government Publications.

DOHC (2002). Strategic Task Force on Alcohol Second Interim Report, May 2002. Health Promotion Unit, Department of Health and Children, Ireland. [www.healthpromotion.ie](http://www.healthpromotion.ie)