

New report says lowering BAC limit will help reduce drunk driving crashes

Lindsay Nadrich , KREM 2:28 AM. PST January 31, 2018



(Photo: KREM)

SPOKANE, Wash. -- A new report wants lawmakers to lower the legal blood alcohol limit, which means some people could be legally impaired after one drink.

The report says lowering the legal blood alcohol limit from .08 to .05 will help reduce the number of drunk driving crashes and deaths.

Nationwide, 29 people die every day in alcohol impaired crashes, that is one death every 49 minutes. Those stats are part of why a new report recommends lowering the legal limit.

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine said their statistics make the change a no brainer: Lives are saved when the legal alcohol limit is dropped to .05.

In several European countries, fatal crashes dropped by 8 to 12 percent. In parts of Australia they dropped from 8 to 18%. A study at the University of Chicago estimated lowering the BAC limit here would reduce fatal alcohol-related crashes by 11 percent.

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If this were to happen in Washington state, what would this mean for drivers who have something to drink and then get behind the wheel?

For a man who weighs 160 pounds, he can usually have 3 drinks in an hour and be right under the current limit of .08. At .05, he could only have two. For a woman who weighs 160 pounds, she can typically have two drinks in an hour to be under .08. At .05 she could only have one.

But keep in mind, that is just an estimate. There are so many other factors that impact impairment. You should never drink and drive.

“Getting into trying to estimate well, ‘Oh, I’m this size person and I’ve had this many drinks and therefore, I should be able to safely drive the car,’ once you’re going down that calculus, you’re on a slippery slope,” Associate Professor at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health David Jernigan said.

Ultimately the goal is to have zero alcohol related crashes. Researchers said this is a good place to start.

"The progress on reducing alcohol-impaired driving has stopped in the U.S. and the number of deaths has actually started creeping back upward," Jernigan explained.

One state has already made the change. In 2017, Utah lowered the limit to .05. It goes into effect at the end of this year.

So will it happen here? An Idaho Transportation Department Transportation employee said everyone is likely waiting to see what happens first in Utah.

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