Facts about Drug-Impaired Driving

A drug is a substance that changes your feelings, perceptions and behavior when you use it. When you are under the influence of one or more drugs, you are a poor judge of your ability to drive. Some drugs produce intense sensations and feelings that make the task of driving seem unimportant. Others make you numb to your surroundings and less able to handle your vehicle and respond to the demands of the road. Drugs will impair your ability to drive safely as much, or more than, alcohol.

Driving Under the Influence of Controlled Substances Is Against the Law

Minnesota law states that you can be arrested if your alcohol concentration is 0.04 or greater. An alcohol concentration of 0.08 ensures arrest and revocation of driving privileges. You can also be arrested for driving under the influence of controlled substances or simply if certain substances are present in your system.

This law is in place because certain substances impair your driving ability, whether you think they do or not.

Specially trained Minnesota law enforcement officers help identify and prosecute people who drive under the influence of drugs.

People who are arrested and convicted of driving while impaired (DWI) are subject to license revocations ranging from 90 days to six years, fines from $1,000 to $20,000 and penalties from 90 days to seven years in prison.

Drivers Under the Influence Are Getting Caught

Minnesota is expending more resources to combat the problem of drug-impaired driving.

Enforcement. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and Minnesota Office of Traffic Safety fund statewide enforcement efforts to apprehend impaired drivers.

DWI Law. Minnesota continues to strengthen its DWI law. Each year, the Legislature tightens the reins on those who drive under the influence of alcohol and drugs.

Public Outcry. Thanks to efforts of many organizations, it is no longer socially acceptable to drive impaired by alcohol or any other drug. This public support ensures that enforcement and legislative efforts have backing to be successful.

Driving Under the Influence Won't Get You Where You Want to Go

More than 30,000 motorists are arrested for DWI each year in Minnesota. Nearly half of those arrested are between the ages of 20 and 29. Minnesota's DWI conviction rate is 80 percent. The system works — and every year the Legislature and the Minnesota law enforcement community work harder to make it better.

Consider the Following:

One out of every three traffic deaths in Minnesota is alcohol-related. Annually, nearly half of these alcohol-related deaths are people under 30 years old.

In most cases impaired drivers, pedestrians and bicyclists kill themselves.

If you kill or injure someone else while driving while impaired you may face fines up to $20,000 and penalties up to 10 years in prison.

Driving Under the Influence Means Loss

Loss of License. Do you have friends and family who can drive you to work or school? If you do, are they willing to give you a ride every day?

Loss of Job. Do you drive for a living? Can you get a ride to work every day? Will your injuries keep you from doing your job?

Loss of Money. If you can still get insurance coverage after being charged with DWI, the cost may be double. The towing bill will cost at least $150. Reinstating your driver's license will be more than $700, and use of ignition interlock will add $100 per month. Lawyer expenses will total about $3,000. And that's just for starters. These costs are in addition to any fines the court will impose.

DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE

A Deadly Decision

TOWARD ZERO DEATHS

Minnesota Department of Public Safety
Office of Traffic Safety
445 Minnesota Street, Suite 150
St. Paul, MN 55101
ots.dps.mn.gov

PI 6510 • 10/2014

The following list includes commonly used drugs. Operating a motor vehicle under the influence of any of these substances can make you an irresponsible, dangerous and out-of-control driver.

Alcohol:

When alcohol enters your system, your ability to control a vehicle immediately begins to deteriorate. Consuming alcohol erodes your ability to use good judgment, concentrate, and react quickly. Vision, motor skills and memory become impaired. Because alcohol is a depressant, inhibitions may be lowered. You may become overconfident of your abilities and engage in irresponsible behavior, such as operating a motor vehicle while impaired.

Depressants:

"Downer" drugs, such as barbiturates, GHB, and tranquilizers, numb the central nervous system to a degree that muscles relax, tension and anxiety are masked, and the user becomes very drowsy. Depressants slow reflexes and impair coordination necessary for driving. Often combined with alcohol, depressants can be deadly. Slower breathing starves the brain of oxygen and impairs decision-making.

Dissociative Anesthetics:

These substances include PCP, Ketamine and Dextromethorphan. They will make you feel detached from reality. Users will not feel pain and may hallucinate and blackout. It will feel like your head is not connected to your body. Users may become aggressive, but since they don't feel pain, they may suffer serious injury without even realizing it.

Hallucinogens:

Powerful psychedelic drugs, such as LSD, ecstasy ('X'), and mescaline, disorient the user and make the task of driving seem nearly irrelevant. Under the influence of these drugs, you are likely to see, hear, smell and feel things that are not there. Your attention will be focused on the effects of these hallucinogens, not on important driving tasks. These bizarre thoughts can produce a sense of panic that can lead to total loss of control.

Inhalants:

Glue, paint, solvents, aerosols and other products with strong, toxic fumes can produce mood changes and emotional detachment. Inhalants deprive the brain of oxygen and can cause you to become dazed, dizzy — or even to lose consciousness.

Marijuana:

Produces a carefree state of mind and the illusion that senses are extra sharp. In reality, you are more likely to be preoccupied with unusual thoughts or visions than your responsibilities as a driver. Relaxed inhibitions alter your sense of time and space, making it difficult to make quick decisions and judge distances and speed. Marijuana use causes slow, disconnected thoughts, poor memory and paranoia. Even hours after the effect seems to be gone, your ability to make driving decisions will still be impaired.

Narcotics:

Heroin, morphine, oxycodone and codeine are addictive drugs that relieve pain, depress mental functions and produce euphoria in the user. Narcotics users' pupils constrict, sometimes to the size of pinpoints, and do not react normally to light changes. This makes it easy to fall asleep at the wheel. Narcotics impair driving skills in ways that are very similar to the effects of depressants.

Over-the-Counter Drugs:

Medicines for treating coughs, colds, allergies and sinus congestion are also considered drugs. Many of these contain antihistamines, ephedrine, or pain killers. They have the same effects as depressants, stimulants and narcotics. Combing these with other drugs or alcohol will be disastrous.

Prescription Medications:

If you are taking any kind of prescription medication, talk to your physician or pharmacist about how it might affect your ability to drive. Also discuss possible complications arising from drinking while taking medications. Prescription medications can be depressants, stimulants, or narcotics, as listed above.

Stimulants:

"Upper" drugs, such as cocaine, methamphetamine, khat and ephedra increase physical energy and mental excitement by suddenly speeding up the heart rate and blood pressure. The artificial energy produced by stimulants makes it difficult to stay calm behind the wheel, sit still, focus attention on the road and make rational judgments. When the high is gone, the user experiences feelings of extreme fatigue and depression.

Combinations:

Mixing drugs with other drugs or with alcohol is a high-risk behavior. Combining substances can multiply the effects of each in dangerous and unexpected ways. The two substances may affect you in completely opposite ways. Either way, this practice can lead to dangerous levels of intoxication and impairment or even death.