



IMPAIRED DRIVING

involves more than you think

It's safety first for CP24's Cam Woolley

Impaired driving has been a criminal offence in Canada since 1921. Thanks to nation-wide efforts and public information campaigns, the number of offences, injuries, and deaths resulting from impaired driving has declined steadily over the decades. Still, drunk driving and other kinds of impaired driving are a major hazard on Ontario's roads.

Ontario has some of the toughest drinking and driving laws and penalties in North America. Yet, each year there are around 13,000 drinking and driving convictions in Ontario. Approximately 80 per cent of those convicted are first-time offenders. During the past decade, more than 2,000 Ontarians have lost their lives and more than 50,000 have sustained injuries in collisions involving a drinking driver.*

The penalties for drinking and driving are no joke. If your blood alcohol concentration (BAC) is more than 0.08, or if you refuse to take an alcohol or drug test, you can be charged under the *Criminal Code* and the *Ontario Highway Traffic Act*. If convicted, you may be banned from driving, have to pay a fine, be required to take part in treatment programs, and even spend time in jail.†

However, alcohol is just one of the many factors that can impair a driver's abilities. *IHSA.ca Magazine* discussed impaired driving on Ontario's roads with Cam Woolley, a traffic and safety specialist with CP24.

Before joining CP24, Woolley was a member of the Ontario Provincial Police for 30 years. His first assignment was as a Toronto traffic cop. And while his job changed over the years, he continued to specialize in traffic crime and collision investigations and enforcement. His expert testimony has resulted in new legislation to improve the safety of Ontario's roads.

Over his career, Woolley has seen first-hand the tragic consequences of impaired driving and the damage that bad judgement can cause on Ontario's roads and highways. By bringing traffic safety issues into the media spotlight, he realized that he could help change people's perception about such issues as drinking and driving and influence their behaviour.

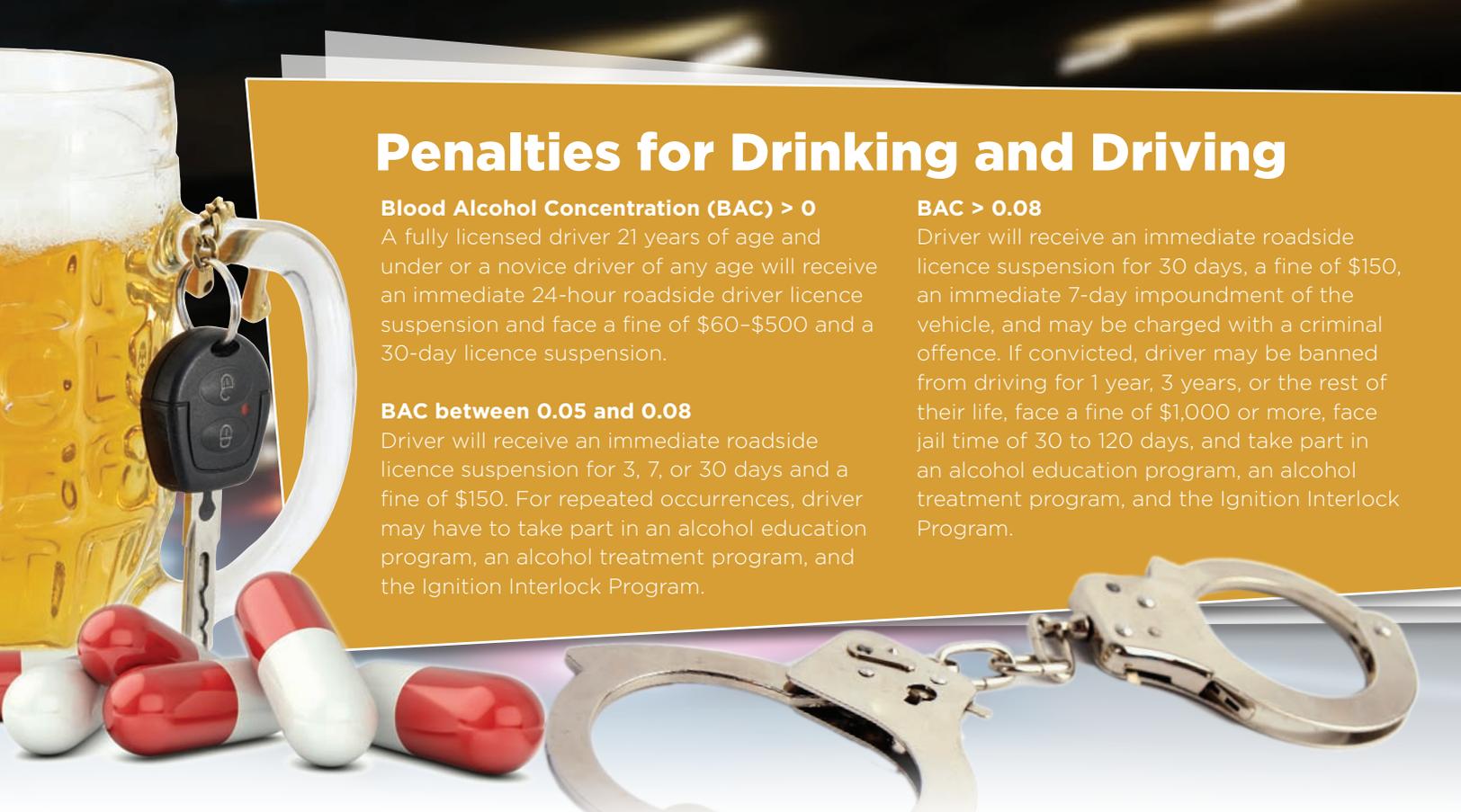
However, Woolley says that there are many other ways drivers can impair their abilities. "The numbers are changing. The officers today are seeing drug arrests creeping up." In some cases, he says, it isn't just illegal drugs. Drivers can be impaired by over-the-counter medication as well.

Lack of sleep can also be an impairment. A fatigued driver finds it hard to pay attention at the wheel. That can be dangerous not only for the driver and any passengers but also for other vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists sharing the road.

"There is no 'drugalyzer' or 'sleepalyzer', so how do you know you are okay to drive?" he says.

*Statistical information provided by the Ontario Ministry of Transportation.

† The Ontario Ministry of Transportation has estimated the total minimum cost of conviction for a drinking and driving offence to be \$18,128. This includes legal and court costs and increased insurance for three years.

A composite image featuring a glass of beer on the left, a set of car keys in the center, and a pair of handcuffs on the right, all set against a light background. The top of the page has a dark orange gradient background with white text.

Penalties for Drinking and Driving

Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) > 0

A fully licensed driver 21 years of age and under or a novice driver of any age will receive an immediate 24-hour roadside driver licence suspension and face a fine of \$60–\$500 and a 30-day licence suspension.

BAC between 0.05 and 0.08

Driver will receive an immediate roadside licence suspension for 3, 7, or 30 days and a fine of \$150. For repeated occurrences, driver may have to take part in an alcohol education program, an alcohol treatment program, and the Ignition Interlock Program.

BAC > 0.08

Driver will receive an immediate roadside licence suspension for 30 days, a fine of \$150, an immediate 7-day impoundment of the vehicle, and may be charged with a criminal offence. If convicted, driver may be banned from driving for 1 year, 3 years, or the rest of their life, face a fine of \$1,000 or more, face jail time of 30 to 120 days, and take part in an alcohol education program, an alcohol treatment program, and the Ignition Interlock Program.

“It’s important to use good judgment and stay off the road if you know you can’t drive safely.”

Another problem is drivers who have been drinking the night before and think it’s safe to drive the next morning. “Some guy who has had a snootful and thinks he has slept it off and hits the road the next day can still be dangerous.”

“A hangover can be an issue. Keep in mind you may not be ready to drive. You’re not on the ball. Can you really drive carefully and pay attention?”

Woolley says it’s important to watch for co-workers that may be using drugs or alcohol and driving personal or company vehicles. “You want to get them help. If you think someone has a problem, go with your instinct.” As Woolley also explains, “The public can assist police in keeping dangerous drivers off the roads.” He points out that there is an exception in the *Highway Traffic Act* that allows drivers to use their cell phones to call 911.

Is it worth the risk?

Anything that changes your mood, or the way you see and feel, will affect the way you drive. So if you’re impaired in any way, don’t get behind the wheel of a vehicle. Remember, your vehicle does not even have to be moving for you to be charged with impaired driving. Don’t put innocent lives at risk. You have other options:

- Call a friend or arrange for a designated driver.
- Take a taxi.
- Stay overnight.
- Take public transit.

Consider the facts. Driving convictions under the *Criminal Code* remain on a driver’s record for at least 10 years. According to Statistics Canada, an impaired driving case is more likely than any other kind of criminal case to result in a guilty verdict. In 2010/2011 more than 84 per cent of drivers charged with impaired driving were found guilty.

As a vehicle owner, you are responsible for taking all reasonable steps to ensure that every person who drives your vehicle has a valid driver’s licence. And if you loan your vehicle to a friend or family member who is charged with driving while impaired, your vehicle can be impounded and you will be responsible for all towing and impoundment costs.

In addition, if you’re involved in a collision while driving impaired, your insurance company may deny some of your coverage. That means you could be personally responsible for the costs if you injure someone or damage their property.

Once you consider the legal, financial, and human costs of impaired driving, you’ll realize it’s simply not worth the risk.

“It’s important to use good judgment and stay off the road if you know you can’t drive safely.”