

## Drugged Driving: Still Alarming

While increased focus on DWI has resulted in stiffer legal penalties and fewer accidents and deaths, what has not been addressed sufficiently is the often overlooked issue of those people who drive while under the influence of prescribed or illicit drugs.

Policy changes related to the legal, recreational and medical use of marijuana have complicated law enforcement efforts as officials scramble to balance legal mandates with public safety concerns. Contributing to the delay in addressing the impaired by drugs while driving issue has been disagreement and inexact science related to the amount of certain drugs determined to cause impairment in drivers.

Separate from marijuana, there are several classes of drugs with a variety of effects. These include the opiates/narcotics; such as illicit heroin, or legally prescribed analgesic (pain reliever) medications, like vicodin, codeine, percocet, and oxycodone. Many of these drugs are abused or taken in excess of the prescribed dosage. Other frequently prescribed medications include the benzodiazepines class (Valium, Librium, Klonopin, and Xanax) which are sedative hypnotic drugs and central nervous system depressants, acting similarly to alcohol when ingested.

Individual history, dosage, frequency and the “half life” of the drug (how long it takes the body to excrete 50% of the drug) are all factors in determining ability impairment, with half-life varying by type of drug. For some narcotics the half life can be 3 to 4 hours while for some benzodiazepine class drugs like Xanax it can be 7 hours or more.

A 2014 survey showed that more than 10 million people reported driving while ability impaired with the highest rates among those aged 18-25. Results from a 2010 nationwide survey revealed that 47% of drivers who tested positive had used prescription drugs, 37% marijuana and 10% cocaine. Drivers with THC the active ingredient in marijuana in the blood were twice as likely to be involved in a deadly crash or be killed.

In yet another survey from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA-2008) >12% of high school seniors reported driving under the influence of marijuana during the two previous. In a report from Monitoring the Future, nearly 28% of high school seniors had put themselves at risk in the two weeks prior to the survey by being in a vehicle with someone who had used marijuana or consumed 5 or more drinks.

The problem is not only significant with young people as research shared in 2010 indicates that more than 25% of those involved in fatal crashes were aged 50 or older.

For help with an alcohol or drug problem contact us at

**LECSA EAP (631)-851-1295**