

NEWS RELEASE

Bill 26 will save lives

What's the fuss, wonder safety experts

EDMONTON/December 1, 2011 – Bill 26 has an excellent chance of saving between 30 and 50 lives a year and changes little except consequences to impaired drivers, says the Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research and MADD Canada.

The two organizations are supportive of the Government of Alberta's proposed legislation to strengthen existing rules around impaired driving.

"We believe that driving is a privilege that needs to be respected. And our impaired driving problem isn't just with drivers who have a blood alcohol concentration over .08%" says Dr. Don Voaklander, Director of the Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research (ACICR). "In one year alone in our province, 12 drivers died who were impaired with blood alcohol concentrations less than .08%. If we consider passengers and other road users, we know that the problem is much bigger."

Opponents to the legislation suggest that the new rules lack a sufficient appeal process. In fact, drivers who test at the roadside have two avenues of appeal. They may ask for a second test at the roadside. They may also ask to go to a police station to test on a device of sufficient accuracy that is certifiable in court for Criminal Code charges.

Enforcement officers currently have authority to suspend, for 24 hours, the licences of drivers who test over .05%. "We are pleased that this new legislation provides more teeth to the consequences of driving with a BAC of .05% to .08%," says Denise Dubyk, MADD Canada's National President. "Now these drivers will face progressively more serious consequences if they choose to drink and drive."

While this new legislation appears to target drivers with moderate BAC levels, research shows that the positive impact will be much broader than that one group. MADD Canada points to international evidence that shows BAC limits set at .05% reduce impaired driving across all BAC levels, including those at high levels.

Some representatives of the hospitality industry have been critical of Bill 26, expressing concern that it will hurt the industry. "The same argument was brought up during the debate over smoking in bars and nightclubs," notes Voaklander.

Currently, all new hires serving liquor must complete the Pro-Serve Liquor Staff Training which addresses issues like legal responsibilities, signs of intoxication, responsible service and refusing service. "Some industry players are already doing a great job of serving responsibly. In fact," says

Voaklander, “a number of establishments in Alberta offer innovative ways of promoting responsible drinking, such as bars that provide rides home.”

Experience from jurisdictions with similar legislation has shown that industry is an important partner in responsible drinking. For instance, all bottled liquor in Australia has the number of standard drink equivalents on the label. Some bars and nightclubs work with enforcement partners to provide testing on-site as a means of education, or provide free non-alcoholic drinks to designated drivers. Both MADD Canada and ACICR are eager to support industry in their efforts.

But ACICR is quick to caution that Bill 26 alone will not completely solve Alberta’s traffic safety issues. The Centre points to international research which shows that there are important factors in effective impaired driving legislation. The public must perceive that there is a high likelihood of getting caught. Consequences should be swift like those of immediate administrative license suspensions. And severe sanctions may lose effectiveness over time unless they are accompanied by continual enforcement and publicity.

“This is a fantastic move in the right direction to save lives and prevent injury in Alberta,” says Voaklander.

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For more information, contact:

Dr. Don Voaklander
Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research
Phone: 780-722-0983
Email: don.voaklander@ualberta.ca

Denise Dubyk
MADD Canada
Phone: 403-970-8733
Email: ddubyk@madd.ca