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Drink, drugs and **driving**



Did you know?

Use of illegal drugs when driving is a growing problem. Around 18% of people killed in road accidents have traces of illegal drugs in their blood – a six-fold increase since the mid 1980s.



The Law

SECTION 4 ROAD TRAFFIC ACT 1988

'A person who, when driving or attempting to drive a motor vehicle on a road or a public place is unfit to drive through drink or drugs is guilty of an offence.'

However, this law requires the police to prove that the driver was 'unfit to drive', and it does not distinguish between legal and illegal drugs.

What do you think?

- Consider the drink driving laws and the way they are enforced.
- Find out the limit for drink driving (it is based on research that shows that driving is severely impaired above this limit).
- Find out what the statistics are for drink driving casualties in the last 10 years
- Discuss the reasons for the statistics changing
- Does alcohol affect everyone in the same way? How does this affect a person's decision on whether to drink and still drive? How long does it take the effects of alcohol to wear off? Is there a danger in driving the morning after?
- Find out why it is very difficult to judge how many drinks would take you up to or over the legal limit. Think about the alcoholic strength of different drinks and the size of pub measures compared with home measures.
- Discuss why it is safer not to drink any alcohol when driving rather than try to drink up to the limit.

Highway Code Rule 84

You must not drive under the influence of drugs or medicine. Check the instructions or ask your doctor or pharmacist. Using illegal drugs is highly dangerous. Never take them before driving; the effects are unpredictable, but can be even more severe than alcohol and may result in fatal or serious road accidents.

Discussion Points



There are difficulties in applying and enforcing drug driving laws – find out what they are. Think about:

- The fact that there is a legal limit for drink driving above which driving ability is severely impaired.
- Is it possible to have a limit for (legal and illegal) drugs and driving, or should there be a zero limit?
- The Police use the breathalyser to test drivers at the roadside for alcohol; how do they test drivers for the presence of drugs at the roadside?

From your research, think about the challenges faced in detecting the presence of drugs and enforcing drug

driving laws. How can education and publicity warn people about the dangers of driving after taking drugs?

Who do you think are the key target groups for education initiatives on drugs and driving? Think about age, sex, and also social activities. Also take into consideration those locations and times when drug taking is more common.



Left: Police breathalyser device for detecting alcohol on a driver's breath



🔍 Did you know?

In 2001 a survey of 17–39 year old drivers in Scotland found:

- 9% of respondents said they had driven under the influence of illegal drugs (5% in the past 12 months).
- Cannabis was the most common drug to have been used when drug driving (reflecting its dominance in drug taking generally).
- Men were more likely than women to have driven under the influence of drugs.
- Drug-driving was more common among 20-24 year olds.
- Driving after recreational drug use was more widespread among individuals attending dance/ night clubs in Scotland.
- Many individuals had accepted a lift in a car driven by someone they knew had been using illegal drugs.

Activities

Using the website www.drugdrive.com and any other sources, in a pair:

- Make a list of illegal drugs or drug groups.
- Note the effects of each drug (or group of drugs).
- How long do the effects last?
- How might these affect your driving?
- Find out what the law says about drugs and driving.

It might be useful to do this in a table.
An example is given below

Drug	Effect on body and mind?	Effect on driving	How long effects last	Law
Cannabis	Slows reaction time Causes sleepiness 	Impaired steering Distorted perception Poor concentration 	Can be detected in urine for up to 4 weeks Intense effect lasts 2-4 hours but can last longer 	Police can test for drugs – and will prosecute 1 year ban Increase in car insurance £5000 fine (max) Up to 6 months in prison If death caused – 2 year ban 10 years in prison (max) Effect on employment

Discussion Points



In small groups:

- Brainstorm the best ways of raising awareness about the dangers of drugs and driving amongst young drivers.
- What methods would you use e.g. TV adverts, posters, something else?
- Where would you target publicity? (locations/events).

Activities

Design an awareness raising campaign to include a leaflet, poster and press release.

Decide whether to cover alcohol, all illegal drugs or one group of drugs. Does your decision change the

method you would use, your target group or where you would locate the campaign?

Think about campaigns used by other groups and try to make yours effective for your target audience.

Run your campaign either in school or in your local community. Make sure that you establish a way to evaluate the success of the campaign. Set a time limit for the campaign, this could be a couple of days or a week or more.

You will need to draw up a plan of action to ensure the smooth running of the campaign and resource all the materials that you need to set it up.



Take it further...



Did you know?

- Many of the 'over-the-counter' treatments for colds, flu and hay-fever that can be bought without a doctor's prescription, also cause drowsiness which might impair driving ability.
- These medicines usually contain one or more of a group of substances called 'antihistamines'. As well as reducing a runny nose, sneezing and allergies some cause drowsiness and are also sold as sleep aids.
- Warnings about drowsiness are not always clear on the packaging or patient advice leaflet. Colds, flu and hay-fever remedies will say 'may cause drowsiness' whilst remedies for sleeplessness which contain the same substances as the flu remedies, say 'will cause drowsiness'.
- The most common antihistamines liable to cause drowsiness are: chlorpheniramine, diphenhydramine, promethazine and triprolidine.



Activities

Devise a short questionnaire to survey people who drive, to find out:

- Do they read the label/instructions for warnings about driving when they take 'over-the-counter' medicines?
- If the label said 'may cause drowsiness' would they avoid driving?

- If they are employed, do they have to tell their employer that they are taking medication which may affect driving?

Use your questionnaire with at least 10 people (friends, family, teachers etc). Present your findings in a short report, to include graphs/pie charts, if possible

Think about your results – Could medicines be labelled differently to make it easier to know if your driving will be affected?

Design a system of labelling for 'over-the-counter' medicines that is clear and allows drivers to quickly check if they should avoid driving.

Present your ideas to the class and vote on the

best/most appropriate option. Write to your local MP to tell them about the option you have chosen as a class, copy the letter to your local health promotion agency and suggest a meeting to discuss the idea. Write a press release to accompany this activity and send to the local press.



Useful links

www.trl.co.uk Transport Research Laboratory
www.drugdrive.com
www.thinkroadsafety.gov.uk
www.srsc.org.uk
www.youthinformation.com
www.talktofrank.com

www.awakeltd.info
www.bupa.co.uk (choose health information tab and then medicines link)
www.rac.co.uk (RAC Report on Motoring: Drink, Drugs and Driving)
www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk (follow the drug link)
www.bma.org.uk (type drugs and driving in the search box)

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