Managing Drug Driving: an Australian perspective

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Overview

- Lessons learnt from managing drink driving:
  - The central role of random breath testing (RBT)
- The prevalence of drug driving in Australia
- Key drug driving countermeasures
  - Random drug testing (RDT)
  - Drug driving public education
- Ongoing challenges and future directions
Percentage of drivers and riders killed with BAC of .05 or more in **Australia**: 1980-2015

(where BAC is known*)

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Sources: ATSB and BITRE

* See explanation on Notes view
Random Breath Testing (RBT) (1)

- Primary drink driving enforcement tool
- Conducted in highly visible, intensive manner to act as a general deterrent
- Underpinned by deterrence theory
- Some states conduct the equivalent of one breath test per licensed driver every year
- Evaluations confirm that RBT has produced long-term reductions in alcohol-related crashes
- Public support for RBT is extremely high (96%)

Random Breath Testing (RBT) (2)
Exposure to RBT activity in previous 6 months, 1993-2013

Source: Petrouilas, 2014
Best practice features of RBT

- Research suggests that RBT is most effective when it is **unpredictable, unavoidable & ubiquitous**
- This requires:
  - sustained high levels of testing, which is highly visible, threatening and rigorous
  - that all drivers stopped should be tested
  - that priority be given to highly visible, stationary operations
  - that operational police be educated about the deterrence principles underpinning RBT
  - operations be reinforced by public education

Prevalence of drug driving

- Growing concern regarding the prevalence of drug driving and its impact on crash risk
- Internationally, studies have detected drugs in between 9% and 40% of driver fatalities (Davey et al, 2009)
- A Victorian study found 26.7% of motorists killed had drugs other than alcohol in their system (Drummer et al, 2003)
- A Victorian roadside study found 2.4% of drivers tested positive for cannabis or amphetamines, which was twice the drink driving detection rate (Drummer et al., 2007)
- A Queensland roadside survey of 2657 drivers in metropolitan and regional centres found that 3.1% had a drug in their system, with cannabis and opiates being the most common (Davey et al, 2009)
Random drug testing

- Historically, drug driving was dealt with by a “Driving Under the Influence” charge, requiring a blood test.
- From 2003, random roadside drug testing was progressively implemented across Australian states.
- Random drug testing targets particular illicit drugs and is based on ‘per se’ legalisation:
  - it is an offence to be detected with a concentration of the stated illicit drugs in the blood or oral fluid, or to refuse to be tested.
  - the roadside saliva test is specific to THC (cannabis), methylamphetamine (speed/ice) and MDMA (ecstasy).

Source: Haworth & Lenne, 2007
Random drug testing (2)

- It is conducted in conjunction with breath testing (and generally only proceeds if the breath test is passed)
- A two-phase saliva test is performed
- A laboratory test is undertaken to confirm results
- Operations tend to target three groups:
  - Truck drivers
  - Young drivers
  - General driving population

Source: Haworth & Lenne, 2007
Random drug testing (3)

PBT for alcohol

EBT for alcohol

Preliminary oral fluid test

Blood test

Second oral fluid test

Lab test

Driver charged drug driving

Driver free to leave

+ve

+ve

+ve

unsuccessful

-ve

-ve

-ve

-ve

PBT = Preliminary breath test
EBT = Evidentiary breath test

Source: Haworth & Lenne, 2007
Preliminary Saliva Test

Source: Queensland Police Service
Random Drug Testing Bus
Random drug testing

- Some variations in practice exist across the Australian states.

- While it is designed to act as a general deterrent, testing rates are considerably lower than those for breath testing - due to higher costs.

- Random drug detection rates are typically higher than for random breath testing e.g. 1:38 vs. 1:107 in Queensland (Davey, Armstrong & Martin, 2014)
Queensland penalties for drug driving

- **Driving with a relevant drug present**
  - The driver is required to attend court where a Magistrate can:
    - Disqualify the driver for 1 – 9 months
    - Impose a fine of up to $1,706
    - Impose a maximum term of imprisonment of up to 3 months
  - Impose stronger penalties for a repeat offender

- **Driving under the influence of liquor or a drug**
  - The driver is immediately suspended and required to attend court where a Magistrate can:
    - Disqualify the driver for up to 6 months
    - Impose a fine of up to $3,413
    - Impose a maximum term of imprisonment of up to 9 months
  - Impose stronger penalties for a repeat offender

Source: Queensland Government (undated)
Example of a supporting mass-media campaign

More drug tests, more often. Drug driving is a serious road safety issue. In the last five years approximately 41% of all drivers and motorcyclists killed who were tested, had drugs in their system. The TAC drug driving campaigns were launched to support random roadside testing of illegal drugs in December 2004. Since then there have been several drug driving campaigns highlighting police enforcement and showing how drugs impair driving.

Source: Victorian Transport Accident Commission (TAC, undated)
Drug driving challenges

- The costs associated with random drug testing makes it difficult to achieve the ‘boots and all’ effect associated with RBT
- Drug detection methods need to be enhanced and adapt to changes in community-wide drug use (e.g., growing use of synthetic drugs, cocaine)
- Little attention has been given to the prevalence of prescription drugs among drivers nor strategies to address this issue
- Ongoing court appeals regarding the specificity of random drug testing procedures
Priorities for the future

- Continue to enhance random roadside drug testing practices to maximize its general deterrent effect
- Better identify drug drivers who are detected with a positive blood alcohol concentration
- Improve the management of recidivist drug drivers
- Develop other effective interventions to target drug driving in the community and high-risk industries
References (1)


BITRE. Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport & Regional Economics. Canberra: Department of Infrastructure & Transport.


References (2)


