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Drug Involvement of Fatally Injured Drivers

While data focusing on the danger of driving under the influence of alcohol is readily available and often cited, less is known or discussed about drivers under the influence of other drugs. The Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS), a census of fatal motor vehicle traffic crashes in the United States, contains a number of variables to describe drug involvement for those in fatal crashes. The *Drug Test* variable contains three linked elements (Test Status, Test Type, and Test Result). The Test Status element provides information on whether or not the person was tested for drugs; Test Type records the type of test (if one was given); and Test Result reports which specific drug (if any) was found. Up to three tests and associated types of drugs can be recorded for an individual. The drug groupings categorized in FARS are narcotics, depressants, stimulants, hallucinogens, cannabinoids, phencyclidines (PCP), anabolic steroids, and inhalants. Each drug within a group is specifically coded in FARS; for more detailed information on drug reporting in FARS, see the FARS Coding and Validation Manual (available online at http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/811353.pdf under the "Drug Test" set of variables).

The data presented in this Crash*Stats concerns fatally injured drivers, since their testing rate is higher than for surviving drivers. It is important to note that drug involvement means only that drugs were found in the driver's system. Drug involvement does not imply impairment or indicate that drug use was the cause of the crash. Drug presence as recorded in FARS includes both illegal substances as well as over-the-counter and prescription medications, which may or may not have been misused. Unlike alcohol data in FARS, there is no measure of the amount of drug present. Finally, nicotine, aspirin, alcohol, and drugs administered after the crash are excluded.

For each of the most recent five years of data, Table 1 shows the total national number of fatally injured drivers, as well as the number and percentage that were tested for drugs, and the test results based on the overall numbers of fatally injured drivers. Table 2 presents, for drivers with known drug test results, the number and percentage that tested positive or negative for each of the same five years. Since drug test results are unavailable for a large portion of fatally injured drivers, questions remain regarding the drug involvement of those not tested or tested with unknown results. Nationwide in 2009, 63 percent of fatally injured drivers were tested for the presence of drugs. Overall, 3,952 fatally injured drivers tested positive for drug involvement in 2009. This number represents 18 percent of all fatally injured drivers (Table 1) and 33 percent of those with known drug test results (Table 2) in 2009. Both the proportion of fatally injured drivers tested and the proportion of these drivers testing positive for drugs generally increased over the 5-year time period shown.

It should be noted that interpretation of these results must be done with caution, since drug involvement rates among those with unavailable drug test results (both those drivers not tested and those tested but for whom results are unknown) may be similar to those for whom results are available, or there may be a systematic bias that could influence the unavailable rates in a positive or negative direction.

Table 1: Drug Test Results for Fatally Injured Drivers, 2005 – 2009

	Total Drivers	All Drivers Tested	Percent Drivers Tested	Drivers Tested					
				Drugs Reported		Drugs Not Reported		Results Unknown	
2005	27,491	15,363	56%	3,710	13%	9,614	35%	2,039	7%
2006	27,348	16,193	59%	4,018	15%	10,307	38%	1,868	7%
2007	26,570	16,676	63%	4,214	16%	10,679	40%	1,783	7%
2008	24,254	15,683	65%	4,267	18%	10,114	42%	1,302	5%
2009	21,798	13,801	63%	3,952	18%	8,103	37%	1,746	8%

Table 2: Drug Test Results for Fatally Injured Drivers With Known Results, 2005 – 2009

	Drivers Tested/ Known Results	Drugs Reported		Drugs Not Reported	
2005	13,324	3,710	28%	9,614	72%
2006	14,325	4,018	28%	10,307	72%
2007	14,893	4,214	28%	10,679	72%
2008	14,381	4,267	30%	10,114	70%
2009	12,055	3,952	33%	8,103	67%

The frequency of drug testing of fatally injured drivers in 2009 is shown for each State in Table 3. States vary widely in the percentage of fatally injured drivers that are reported to be tested for drugs. In 2009, Maine did not report any tests, and Mississippi reported only 2 percent tested. A number of States report testing of more than 80 percent of fatally injured drivers. Data for Massachusetts shows unknown testing status for 44 percent of fatally injured drivers in 2009, while 17 States and Puerto Rico report no drivers with unknown testing status. National totals in both tables exclude Puerto Rico.

It is important to note that States may differ in their determination of the presence or absence of a drug. Differing State and local laws, policies, and practices regarding drug test practices can introduce inconsistencies. States as well as jurisdictions within a State may test for different drugs, use different test types, and/or employ different concentration thresholds for determining a positive test result. Another challenge for the collection of information about drugs in fatal crashes is the police accident report (PAR) itself. PARs vary across jurisdictions, creating disparities in reporting, resulting in possible variation in the reported number of crashes involving drugged driving. Additional data limitations include the variation across jurisdictions in the availability of toxicology lab work by the time the FARS file is closed as well as the possibility of contaminated test samples resulting in unknown test results. Any national or State count of drug-involved crashes should be interpreted with these limitations in mind due to potential under-reporting in some States and over-reporting in others.

For more information regarding the above reported data, contact NCSA at 202-366-4198, or toll free at 800-934-8517. This issue of Crash*Stats and other general information on highway traffic safety may be accessed by Internet users at www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/cats/index.aspx.

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Table 3: Drug Test Results for Fatally Injured Drivers, by State, 2009

State	Not Tested for Drugs		Tested, No Drugs Reported		Tested, Drugs Found		Tested, Results Unknown		Unknown if Tested		Total
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number
Alabama	269	44%	33	5%	31	5%	274	45%	3	0%	610
Alaska	11	33%	11	33%	7	21%	0	0%	4	12%	33
Arizona	129	30%	129	30%	82	19%	8	2%	79	19%	427
Arkansas	277	65%	82	19%	66	16%	0	0%	0	0%	425
California	187	11%	1,013	60%	388	23%	90	5%	0	0%	1,678
Colorado	49	16%	149	48%	72	23%	41	13%	1	0%	312
Connecticut	2	1%	29	18%	90	57%	12	8%	24	15%	157
Delaware	46	67%	12	17%	9	13%	2	3%	0	0%	69
Dist of Columbia	0	0%	5	50%	3	30%	0	0%	2	20%	10
Florida	622	42%	622	42%	239	16%	2	0%	0	0%	1,485
Georgia	414	48%	285	33%	121	14%	43	5%	0	0%	863
Hawaii	0	0%	47	64%	25	34%	0	0%	2	3%	74
Idaho	79	54%	45	31%	13	9%	8	5%	2	1%	147
Illinois	128	22%	312	54%	132	23%	2	0%	1	0%	575
Indiana	190	39%	173	35%	108	22%	22	4%	0	0%	493
Iowa	244	89%	13	5%	8	3%	9	3%	0	0%	274
Kansas	173	64%	61	23%	34	13%	2	1%	1	0%	271
Kentucky	151	26%	254	43%	182	31%	1	0%	3	1%	591
Louisiana	170	32%	56	10%	57	11%	230	43%	26	5%	539
Maine	121	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	121
Maryland	31	9%	200	59%	85	25%	1	0%	21	6%	338
Massachusetts	13	6%	69	33%	20	9%	16	8%	94	44%	212
Michigan	140	26%	133	24%	107	20%	64	12%	102	19%	546
Minnesota	23	9%	189	72%	24	9%	5	2%	23	9%	264
Mississippi	476	98%	0	0%	4	1%	0	0%	7	1%	487
Missouri	277	46%	151	25%	161	27%	8	1%	3	1%	600
Montana	28	17%	4	2%	124	77%	0	0%	5	3%	161
Nebraska	123	73%	32	19%	14	8%	0	0%	0	0%	169
Nevada	10	7%	89	63%	28	20%	15	11%	0	0%	142
New Hampshire	14	20%	40	56%	13	18%	1	1%	3	4%	71
New Jersey	48	15%	189	60%	71	23%	0	0%	6	2%	314
New Mexico	0	0%	219	99%	2	1%	0	0%	0	0%	221
New York	27	4%	342	56%	93	15%	3	0%	146	24%	611
North Carolina	2	0%	521	59%	10	1%	347	39%	0	0%	880
North Dakota	30	33%	36	40%	12	13%	0	0%	13	14%	91
Ohio	115	16%	362	51%	205	29%	21	3%	0	0%	703
Oklahoma	466	89%	31	6%	24	5%	0	0%	0	0%	521
Oregon	196	79%	30	12%	22	9%	0	0%	0	0%	248
Pennsylvania	98	11%	472	55%	149	17%	135	16%	5	1%	859
Rhode Island	19	41%	12	26%	6	13%	0	0%	9	20%	46
South Carolina	69	11%	292	48%	162	26%	0	0%	91	15%	614
South Dakota	47	53%	29	33%	7	8%	6	7%	0	0%	89
Tennessee	262	38%	79	12%	91	13%	250	37%	0	0%	682
Texas	842	42%	579	29%	461	23%	14	1%	125	6%	2,021
Utah	102	69%	28	19%	14	9%	2	1%	2	1%	148
Vermont	4	7%	26	46%	22	39%	0	0%	4	7%	56
Virginia	161	32%	171	33%	82	16%	0	0%	97	19%	511
Washington	19	6%	154	51%	116	38%	0	0%	15	5%	304
West Virginia	11	4%	175	69%	65	26%	0	0%	3	1%	254
Wisconsin	130	33%	78	20%	74	19%	112	28%	1	0%	395
Wyoming	26	30%	40	47%	17	20%	0	0%	3	3%	86
National	**7,071**	**32%**	**8,103**	**37%**	**3,952**	**18%**	**1,746**	**8%**	926	4%	**21,798**
Puerto Rico	61	36%	86	51%	22	13%	0	0%	0	0%	169