

Impaired Driving – a Focus Area of the Delaware SHSP

Drug and alcohol impairment continue to cause severe injuries and fatalities from crashes on Delaware highways (indeed, between 2015 and 2019, impaired driving was a factor in 30% of fatalities and 16% of serious injuries), and so it continues to be a battleground area. The Delaware Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) has been updated for 2021-2025. The data-driven plan selects eight Emphasis Areas on which to focus for the planning period. In this article, we will have a brief look at the Impaired Driving Emphasis Area, but we encourage you to have a look at the SHSP itself and consult the additional resources on DelDOT's support [page](#) as well.

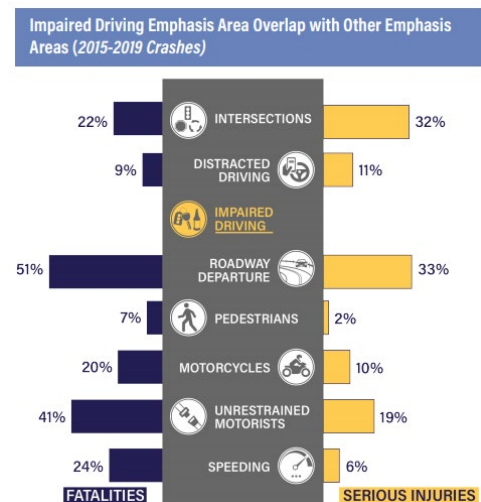
In Delaware, a driver is considered legally impaired when their blood alcohol concentration (BAC) is 0.08 percent or greater or there is the presence of an illicit or recreational drug within the driver's blood.

This is another emphasis area that relies heavily on the “4Es” – Engineering, Education, Emergency Response, and Enforcement. Our best efforts at engineering and maintenance can serve to make the roadway safer for all users, but the hearts and minds of roadway users need to change if we are to genuinely pursue a Toward Zero Deaths goal.

In 2019, there were 239 serious injury and fatal crashes in Delaware, down from a recent high of 271 in 2017. In the 2015-2019 planning period, nearly 19% of fatalities and serious injuries involved distracted driving. As with other Emphasis Areas, there is crossover of factors, and impaired driving crashes often coincide with roadway departures and intersections, with unrestrained motorists, another common factor.

Distracted drivers are strongly biased towards males (78%) and are over-represented as driver age reduces. Not surprisingly, these crashes peak as closing time approaches and weekends are a popular time. Similarly, 45% of serious injuries and fatalities occur during dark, unlit periods. Oh, and no it's a home-grown thing – 87% of impaired drivers were Delaware residents.

So, what is the plan for 2021-2025? The SHSP calls for four strategy areas. Strategy 1 is to develop and distribute consistent public information messages to increase public awareness of the laws and dangers of impaired driving. Strategy 2 is to strengthen impaired driving enforcement programs. Strategy 3 is to install proven engineering treatments to mitigate the consequences of impaired driving (i.e., a more forgiving



roadway). Strategy 4 will improve data collection and monitoring of impaired driving trends.

Each of these strategy areas include three to seven specific action items that the 4E's will collaborate on over the five-year period with the objective of reducing distracted driving fatalities and serious injuries by 15%. To learn more about the specific strategies, have a closer look at the [plan](#).

Education and enforcement are front and center for this emphasis area. Just over halfway towards Delaware's definition of legal intoxication (0.08% blood alcohol concentration, BAC), most drivers can experience reduced coordination, difficulty steering, lesser ability to track moving objects, and a reduced response to sudden or emergency circumstances. At 0.08% BAC, it can get much worse, but clearly our efforts at convincing drivers is still not getting through as much as we would like.

BAC BLOOD ALCOHOL CONCENTRATION	EFFECTS ON YOU	EFFECTS ON YOUR DRIVING
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Muscle coordination becomes poor (e.g., balance, speech, vision, reaction time and hearing)• Harder to detect danger• Judgment, self-control, reasoning and memory are impaired	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Concentration• Short-term memory loss• Speed control• Reduced information processing capability (e.g., signal detection, visual search)• Impaired perception

Another educational challenge moving forward will be the legal status of cannabis. While different states, including Delaware, have moved towards various forms of legalized use, it remains illegal everywhere in the United States to drive while under the influence of alcohol, illicit drugs or even drugs prescribed by your doctor if misused.

Reducing serious injuries and fatalities on Delaware roadways will take a continued, long-term diligence on the part of all stakeholders, including roadway users. Engineering, maintenance, enforcement, education, and emergency response are key to the long-term objective of Toward Zero Deaths, but roadway users (drivers, motorcycle riders, pedestrians, cyclists, skateboarders, and segwayers) must join the fight and be less impaired, less distracted, more restrained, and slow down.

