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Anti-Drunk Driving Program Initiatives: A Perspective Assessment of Future Program Needs

In 1983 the Presidential Commission on Drunk Driving issued a report presenting a multifaceted strategy for reducing alcohol impaired driving. The strategy was based on 39 recommendations which states and communities were urged to implement. The National Commission Against Drunk Driving (NCADD), the successor to the Presidential Commission, conducted a study of the states' implementation of these recommendations. The purpose of this project was to identify the specific countermeasures that have been implemented, determine the problems that were encountered, and make a prospective assessment of future programs required to further reduce the incidence of drinking and driving.

Study Design:

The data collection methodology applied in this study consisted of a survey of state officials involved in drunk driving programs, along with the state leaders of private organizations with an alcohol-driving interest such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), Remove Intoxicated Drivers (RID), and the American Automobile Association (AAA). Data were gathered from these surveys (including follow-up interviews), state task force reports, reports prepared by the NHTSA Center for Statistics and Analysis, and members of an Advisory Committee organized by NCADD. Data collected from these sources were analyzed and grouped into "libraries" according to the most commonly cited responses. Follow-up interviews were conducted with respondents from 10 states selected on the basis of statistical profiles which indicated low alcohol-related traffic fatality rates, high alcohol-related fatality rates, rates appearing to be increasing and states with decreasing rates. Data were obtained from those states which tested 70 percent or more of their fatally injured drivers between 1983 and 1988. Interviews were conducted to verify the survey results and obtain more detailed information concerning the strengths and weaknesses of specific program initiatives. Data obtained from all sources were reviewed by the NCADD Advisory Committee which made final judgements concerning the study findings and recommendations, including the prospective assessment of future program needs.

Major Evaluation Results:

- o Only one of the Commission's original recommendations for reducing drunk driving, passage of a law establishing the minimum alcohol drinking age as 21, has been implemented in all 50 states. Between 1983-1988, 26 states raised their minimum drinking age to this level. Substantial progress has been made in

38 states in the passage of victim compensation legislation, 27 states passed laws authorizing administrative license suspensions or revocations for drivers failing an alcohol breath test, 32 states passed "dram shop" laws establishing liability against any person who sells or serves alcohol beverage to visibly intoxicated individuals, 40 states established legal permission for sobriety checkpoints and 38 states provided victim compensation in drunk driving crashes.

- o The study identified important drunk driving countermeasures that are not yet in operation at an acceptable level. More than one-half of the states do not have an open container law and only three states have passed such a law since 1985. Other countermeasures not receiving adequate attention by the states include anti-plea bargaining statutes, mandatory alcohol evaluations and preliminary breath test laws.
- o Four major obstacles were found to hinder attempts to reduce drunk driving: (1) a lack of funds and manpower; (2) an overburdened court and correction system with major negative contributions from plea bargaining, the issuance of hardship licenses and insufficient training for prosecutors and judges; (3) a persistent problem of recidivism; and (4) a lack of effective law enforcement including inadequate procedures for arresting and booking, conducting courtroom and administrative hearings, and conducting alcohol and drug tests. Lack of sufficient public interest in drunk driving was identified as a secondary problem.

Conclusions:

The NCADD concludes that the four major obstacles identified in this study are widespread and threaten to undermine the success of current programs. To address these problems, the NCADD recommends that the states reconvene their Drunk Driving Task Forces for the purpose of assessing the adequacy of existing legislation and evaluating the success of each state's anti-drunk driving programs. New interest-group representatives should be included as Task Force members including employers, public health officials and citizen activists not previously involved. Specific actions recommended include the development of creative user-funded programs to shift the cost of combatting drunk driving from the general public to those sharing responsibility for the problem; elimination of plea bargaining; assessment of systems by state and local authorities to identify specific problems and corrective actions; mandatory alcohol assessment of all DWI offenders to identify those needing treatment; progressive administrative license sanctions for repeat offenders; and increased efficiency in arrest, testing and booking procedures.

For further information about this project contact: Dr. Richard P. Compton, U.S. Department of Transportation, NHTSA, Room 5125E, 400 7th Street, S.W. Washington, DC 20590, (202) 366-2699.