

A Deadly Curve

By Suze Hargraves

Santa Claus is coming to town. So are Jack Daniels, Johnny Walker and Captain Morgan so, in preparation for the upcoming holiday party season, we're going to take a look at the topic of drinking and driving. I know, nobody likes a party pooper, but when lives are at stake, I'm pretty comfortable with playing that role. In Carroll County an estimated 10 out of 10,000 people die per year as a result of drunk driving (www.drinkinganddriving.org). Most people understand the basics of what drunk driving is and have at least a cursory understanding of New Hampshire drunk driving laws, but there are some factors that can throw a lethal curve at what you think you know.

Drunk driving laws are based on numbers. In New Hampshire, if you're over 21, the legal limit is .08% blood alcohol. Legally if you've had one or two drinks you're not likely to come in at .08. There's a problem with those numbers though; they don't account for medications, state of mind or how fatigued you are behind the wheel. All of those factors are going to change, not the number, but your ability to operate a vehicle. Let's take a look at how each of those factors changes what you think you know about drinking and driving.

Medications

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism reports: "More than 150 medications interact harmfully with alcohol. These interactions may result in increased risk of illness, injury, and even death. Alcohol's effects are heightened by medicines that depress the central nervous system, such as sleeping pills, antihistamines, antidepressants, anti-anxiety drugs, and some painkillers. In addition, medicines for certain disorders, including diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease, can have harmful interactions with alcohol." This bit of information applies to the half of Americans estimated to be taking at least one prescription drug. It also applies to the estimated 7 million Americans abusing prescription drugs.

State of Mind

Alcohol is a depressant. If you're depressed and you drink you're going to get more depressed. If you weren't depressed to begin with, you may find that consuming alcohol puts you on a downward slope. Some people have issues with anger which are heightened by even minimal consumption of alcohol. Consumption also leads to heightened risk taking, inability to logic and inability to appropriately measure the consequences of behavior. None of these states of mind would be good ways to operate a vehicle.

Fatigue:

Alcohol makes you tired. One drink at a party may relax you, but it also puts you at risk for dozing off behind the wheel. Usually we don't realize we're effected by that single drink until we're behind the wheel on our dark, unforgiving roads. According to The U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), an estimated 100,000 police-reported crashes annually involve fatigue as a principal cause. Remember, designated drivers need to be 100% sober. Relax at home. Stay alert and awake on the roads.

It's okay to let Jack, Johnny and the Captain come to the party, but it's not okay to drive once you've sat down with them or any other form of alcohol. Stay safe this holiday season. Either stay sober, stay where you are or leave the keys with someone 100% sober. Don't let alcohol throw you a deadly curve.

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