



Drunk Driving is a Costly Killer, Reports Erie Insurance April is Alcohol Awareness Month

ERIE, Pa. --- April 9, 1999 --- Imagine reading the headline: **"Two jetliners collide, killing 315 people. Cause of crash: pilot was drunk!"** The tragic reality is 315 people are dying every week at the hands of drunk drivers on our nation's roads. Although it's not grabbing national headlines, thousands of people are being killed each year -- one person every 32 minutes -- and more than one million Americans are injured annually in alcohol-related crashes.

Although the number of deaths attributed to Driving Under the Influence (DUI) have fallen slightly in recent years, alcohol-related crashes cost billions of dollars and thousands of lives each year. It is a costly, yet all-too-common crime. And this crime -- along with the emotional, social and insurance costs that accompany it -- can be prevented.

"Drunk driving has plagued this country for so long that many people have become numb to the statistics," said Stephen A. Milne, President and Chief Executive Officer of Erie Insurance Group, one of the nation's largest auto insurers. "But this problem is not about numbers, it's about lives that are being devastated and destroyed. In light of April being designated national Alcohol Awareness month, we all need to take action in our personal lives to put an end to this catastrophic crime."

While it's impossible to put a value on the lives taken by drunk driving, DUI crashes have a measurable economic impact. In addition to fatalities, another 1,058,990 Americans were injured in alcohol-related crashes in 1997. That's an average of one person injured about every 30 seconds. About 30,000 people a year will suffer permanent work-related disabilities from these crashes.

According to figures from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the economic cost of motor vehicle traffic crashes in 1994 totaled \$150.469 billion in the U.S. This equates to a \$2.817 billion cost to employers or \$500 per employee. About 40 percent of these costs can be attributed to crashes involving alcohol.

Even when drunk drivers are not involved in accidents, those convicted of Driving Under the Influence will pay court costs, legal fees, increased insurance costs and a variety of related charges. For instance, the average cost of a DUI conviction -- including high-risk insurance, legal fees, court costs, income loss, rehabilitation and driver's license reinstatement -- is \$9,750.

The Good News

We are making progress. In fact, 1997 marked the first time ever that the percentage of traffic deaths related to drunken driving fell below 40 percent in the United States. Since 1982, annual alcohol-related traffic deaths have been reduced 36 percent, saving more than 100,000 lives.

What Can You Do?

According to NHTSA, 97 percent of people who are of driving age consider drinking and driving by others a threat to themselves and their families. And their concern is justified since about three in every five Americans will be involved in an alcohol-related crash at some time in their lives.

There are steps you can take, however, to protect yourself and your loved ones.

1. **Buckle Up.** Your best defense against a drunk driver is to wear your safety belt and be sure children are secured in child safety seats.
2. **Adopt a zero tolerance attitude.** Never ride in a car with someone who has been drinking -- call a cab or find someone else to drive you home. Remember that impairment begins with just one drink.
3. **Avoid driving or be extra alert during high-risk times.** Every weekday night from 10 p.m. to 1 a.m., one in 13 drivers is drunk (BAC of .08 or more). Between 1 a.m. and 6 a.m. on weekend mornings, one in seven drivers is drunk.
4. **Report erratic driving to law enforcement.** If you witness a driver who appears to be drunk, report it to your local police department.
5. **Implement a "call me" policy with teenagers.** Instruct them to never get into a car with a driver who's been drinking, but instead to call you for a ride, "no questions asked."
6. **Be a responsible party host.** Serve food and offer non-alcoholic beverages. Never let your guests drive after drinking alcohol and never serve alcohol to someone under the age of 21.

"Police can increase enforcement, organizations can step up anti-drunk driving messages and friends can take the keys away. But the true responsibility for preventing drunk driving rests on the shoulders of individual drivers," Milne said. "Each and every motorist is responsible for his or her own actions. There is no excuse for driving drunk and taking a chance of killing yourself or someone else."

With more than 2.5 million policies in force, Erie Insurance Group is the 17th largest property/casualty insurance group and the 12th largest auto insurer in the United States. Erie Insurance Group includes seven companies operating in 10 states and the District of Columbia. Erie Indemnity Company (NASDAQ - ERIE) is the management company for Erie Insurance Group.