



Media Release

For Immediate Release

June 25, 2008

BCAA Traffic Safety Foundation Pleased with New Drug Impairment Law

(Burnaby, BC) – As of July 2, 2008 drivers will have to submit to a Standardized Field Sobriety Test for impairment when demanded by a peace officer who suspects they are driving while impaired by drugs.

Bill C-2 empowers Canadian police who suspect a driver of being impaired by any drug, illegal, prescription or over-the-counter, to demand the subject submit to a breathalyzer test, physical coordination tests and an assessment by a Drug Recognition Expert using the Drug Evaluation and Classification (DEC) assessment along with a demand of bodily fluid samples (blood, saliva or urine).

“We are very pleased with this new law,” stated Allan Lamb, executive director of the BCAA Traffic Safety Foundation. “Reducing the number of drug impaired drivers on B.C.’s roads is a priority for the Foundation.”

During the month of June, the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse held random roadside drug surveys in several B.C. communities to gather baseline information about the extent of impairment by drugs as well as alcohol. Results of this survey should be known this fall.

“I am particularly concerned that young drivers who act responsibly toward the problem of drinking and driving, have no idea that they are also impaired after using cannabis,” says Lamb, who was present at one of the roadside surveys in the Lower Mainland.

Research supporting this legislation is clear. Epidemiologic studies of drug use among fatally injured drivers in Canada indicate that drugs, often in combination with alcohol, are detected in up to 30 per cent of fatally injured drivers. Public opinion surveys indicate that about 17 per cent of Canadian drivers report having driven within two hours of using an impairing substance. According to CCSA's Canadian Addiction Survey, 5 per cent of drivers in Canada admitted driving within two hours of using cannabis, a 50 per cent increase since 1989. Among those 16 to 18, 21 per cent reported having driven after using cannabis, slightly higher than the 20 per cent who reported driving after alcohol use.

"Such findings suggest that the drugs and driving problem is by no means insignificant and may in fact be increasing," says CCSA Manager of Research and Policy Doug Beirness.

New penalties under the law include a fine of not less than \$1,000 for the first offence, and imprisonment for the second offence of not less than 30 days and not less than 120 days for each subsequent offence.

Anyone convicted of operating a vehicle under the influence of drugs, alcohol or both will be prohibited from driving a vehicle for one to three years for the first offence and two to five years for the second offence.

There are currently over 1,100 officers in B.C. trained to recognize drug impairment in drivers. Officers with drug recognition training will now be present at road checks in communities around the province.

"Summertime marks the highest rates of driving while impaired in BC. With the enactment of Bill C-2 on July 2 we hope to see a reversal in this trend," said Lamb.

Time is the only thing that reduces the effects of impairment. Don't get behind the wheel if you have consumed alcohol or drugs.

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About BCAA Traffic Safety Foundation:

The BCAA Traffic Safety Foundation (TSF) is a non-profit registered charity working with families, communities and business partners to reduce the number and severity of traffic crashes and injuries in B.C. For more information contact visit www.bcaatsf.ca or call 604-298-5107.

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