



[New Study Shows Fewer Drunk Drivers on the Road – But It’s Missing the Point](#)

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The February issue of [Status Report](#) brought good news: a NHTSA study shows a big drop in the number of people driving drunk on the weekends, but drunk drivers are still a major cause of fatal motor vehicle accidents in the U.S. (“*Drinking Continues to Decline Among Weekend Drivers*,” Status Report, Vol. 45, No. 1, Feb. 6, 2010).

There’s a caveat or two about the study: today, people may be *less likely to participate* in a roadside study than they were when the research began back in the early 1970s. So, part of the drop in numbers may mean that lots of people that are driving with a buzz after a Friday happy hour aren’t talking about it now. And, the focus of the research results is totally about alcoholic beverages.

Impaired Drivers Are Doing More Than Drinking Alcohol

This is a key issue. Many drivers who are driving impaired may not be drinking alcohol. They may be taking pills or drinking liquid enhancers (or both) to stay on the road longer. Driving impairment that causes fatal crashes isn’t just about beer, wine, or mixed drinks.

A 1991 study by Monash University found that [25% of truck drivers took pills to stay awake on the job](#). There are other studies.

What are these Stay Awake Pills?

Heck, these pill manufacturers actually market to truck drivers: check out the online advertisement for “Stay Awake Pills” from T&M Distributing: they’re offering their [“... legendary “Buy Two Get One Free” special, which means “stay awake pills” can be purchased at approximately a 75% savings over the major brands of alertness aids.”](#) Clicking on their site today, you can buy 100 of their “357 Magnum Tablet” for \$9.95.

They’re basically [selling caffeine in tablet form](#).

Of course, other pills are out there to keep people from falling asleep: students across the country are taking [Adderall and Ritalin](#) to pull “all-nighters” — [Adderal](#) being one of newer versions of [amphetamine](#). Other forms of [amphetamine](#) (“speed”) on the market today include Dexadrine and Vyvance. [Crystal Meth is an illegal form of speed, cheap and readily available \(street names include “go fast,” and “crank”\).](#)

Was the School Bus Driver Impaired by Wake-Up Pills?

But the real story lies in the lives of people out there on the roads. Like last week’s testimony in Canada, where a school bus driver took the stand in a case resulting from an October 2007 school bus crash, killing a 9-year-old girl. [On the stand, she admitted to taking pills](#) to stay awake, but denied taking a pep pill that morning. Evidence, however, already shows a [package of “wake-up” pills was on the bus](#), discovered by Crime Scene Investigators after the fatal accident occurred.

What Does the NHTSA Study Really Tell Us?

So, getting back to the NHTSA study: its number sure sound good at first glance. However, reading closely you find that they sent out people to ask drivers on the roads about what they had been drinking, and they did it on Friday and Saturday nights, and on Friday during the day, as it led into the weekend. Times when they thought most people are out there, imbibing alcohol.

The report admits people may not have told them the truth (for privacy reasons, fear of liability or litigation, what have you), but the truth is that the real issue is driver IMPAIRMENT not just drivers who drink alcohol.

Impairment – that is the real issue.