

NEWS

Drunk driving deaths down for a second consecutive year

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B.C.'s toughened roadside penalties on drinking drivers are being credited with cutting alcohol-related crash deaths for a second straight year.

The province estimates 104 lives have been saved since the immediate roadside prohibition (IRP)

system took effect in September 2010.

That's based on a drop from an average of 114 impaired fatalities prior to the new rules, to 66 in the first full year of the IRP program and 58 in the second year.

Provincial government officials say the initiative has drastically changed British Colum-

bian attitudes to drinking and getting behind the wheel.

"As you drive home late at night, the car coming toward you is far less likely to be piloted by an impaired driver than at any time in recent years," Justice Minister Shirley Bond said.

She said B.C. is so far averaging a 46 per cent

drop in drunk driving fatalities—better than a target of 35 per cent set in 2010 in honour of impaired driving victim Alexa Middelaer.

The roadside penalties can result in licence suspensions, vehicle impoundments and can cost drivers \$600 to \$4,000 in administrative penal-

ties and remedial program costs.

The new approach has also meant a major shift away from criminal prosecution of suspected im-

paired drivers, which consumes much police investigation and court time.

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REMEMBRANCE... Paul Hergott, a *Capital News* columnist and advocate for safer driving habits, led the National Day of Remembrance for Road Crash Victims service held in the Orchard Park Mall parking lot last week. In the last five years, 578 people have been killed in car crashes in the Southern Interior, with an average of 116 people killed every year. Speeding is the leading cause of car crash fatalities in B.C. On average, 47 people are killed each year in the Southern Interior in speed-related crashes. Each October there is an average of 33 crashes resulting in injuries or death in the Southern Interior due to people driving too fast for the conditions. That number more than triples in December to 109 as the driving conditions worsen. The National Day of Remembrance is intended to acknowledge traffic accident victims and encourage drivers to reflect on how their own driving behaviours can help keep themselves and everyone on our roads safe.

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