

## **BATTLING DRUNKEN DRIVING GETS UTAH A B+**

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Utah leads the nation with the lowest percentage of alcohol-related traffic deaths, but it still earns only a B+ in its overall efforts against drunken driving.

That's still better than the C the nation as a whole earns, according to report cards released Tuesday by Mothers Against Drunk Driving, Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, and Nationwide Insurance. "There seems to be a false perception that the war on drunk driving has been won. But the truth is, last year impaired-driving deaths rose for the first time in a decade," said MADD National President Katherine Prescott.

So on the eve of the Thanksgiving holiday - one of the busiest and deadliest periods on the nation's highways - the groups released their first such ratings in three years.

And the nation's grade dropped from a B-, mostly because of the 3 percent increase in 1995 of alcohol-related traffic deaths nationally, when 17,274 people were killed.

In Utah last year, 86 of its 326 traffic fatalities - or 26.3 percent - died in alcohol-related accidents. MADD noted that percentage was the lowest in the nation and much lower than the national average of 41.3 percent.

But the groups still saw room for improvement in Utah, giving its efforts a B+ - putting it in a five-way tie for fifth best among the states (see chart above).

The safety and insurance groups gave letter grades to each state in 11 areas. Utah earned an A for trends toward a lower percentage of alcohol-related deaths; tough criminal sanctions; and for requiring offenders to help cover the costs of their misdeeds and anti-drunken driving programs.

Utah earned an A- in leadership, noting that Gov. Mike Leavitt and the Legislature are generally supportive of anti-drunken driving measures, but it said there has been little legislative activity on such matters since 1993.

Utah earned a B+ in four areas: statistics and record keeping; youth legislation, prevention and education; victim issues; and laws.

Some problems the groups perceive in those areas are low reporting of disposition of driving-under-the-influence cases by some local courts; low compensation awards to crash victims; and lack of a "graduated license" law for teenage drivers.

The groups gave Utah a B in regulatory control, saying it should improve investigations into sales of alcohol to minors.

They gave Utah a C in public awareness programs, and a C+ for law enforcement - saying increased use of sobriety checkpoints (and laws to allow expansion of them) are needed, along with more officers, funding and jail space - and less paperwork.

Nationally, Prescott said one of the most urgent needs is a law that Utah already passed - lowering the percentage of alcohol in blood at which drivers are presumed drunk from 0.10 to 0.08, and to have "zero tolerance" for drivers under legal drinking age.

The groups also urged caution on the roads during the upcoming holiday season, noting that 527 people died on the roads nationally on Thanksgiving last year - and just over half, 275, were alcohol-related.

Prescott, who had a 16-year-old son killed by a drunken driver in 1981, noted that deaths by drunken drivers continue "at a pace of two deaths an hour, 48 deaths a day and

332 deaths a week."

She noted, ``That is the equivalent of two jetliners tragically crashing, week after week after week. Whenever a jetliner tragically crashes, there is a blizzard of media attention and a huge public outcry" - and her group hopes for similar attention to drunken driving.

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## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Efforts against drunken driving

U.S. - GRADED

### GRADE STATE

A- Ariz., Calif., Fla., N.C.

B+ Utah, Kan., Md., N.Y., Ohio.

B Ala., Ark., Ill., Maine, Minn., N.J., Ore., Pa.

B- Ga., Idaho, Ind., Iowa, Ken., Mich., Miss., Mo., N.M., Wis.

C+ Conn., Hawaii, Mass., Neb., Nev., Okla., Pa., Wash., W.V.

C United States, Alaska, Colo., Mont., N.H., N.D., R.I., S.C., S.D., Texas.

C- Del., La., N.J., Ver.

D+ Wyo.

Source: "Rating the States," by Mothers Against Drunk Driving.