

## **NHTSA: Utah's .05% Law Shows Promise to Save Lives, Improve Road Safety**

New study shows lowering impaired driving legal limit reduced fatalities with limited increase in arrests, no economic losses in 2019

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The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has found that traffic deaths in Utah decreased, and more drivers said they arranged for sober rides home, when the State lowered its impaired driving legal limit to .05%.

In a [new study](#) published today, NHTSA found Utah's fatal crash rate dropped by 19.8% in 2019, the first year under the lower legal limit, and the fatality rate decreased by 18.3%. The fatality rate measures the number of fatalities over total vehicle miles traveled, whereas the fatal crash rate measures the number of crashes involving a fatality over total vehicle miles traveled.

In 2019, despite increased vehicle miles traveled, Utah recorded 225 fatal crashes and 248 fatalities, lower than the 259 fatal crashes and 281 fatalities in 2016, the last full year before Utah voted to lower the blood alcohol level to .05%. Utah is the first State to adopt the .05% blood alcohol concentration limit.

Utah's drop in crash and fatality rates was a significant improvement over the rest of the United States during the post-implementation year studied, which had a 5.6% fatal crash rate reduction and a 5.9% fatality rate reduction in 2019. The neighboring States of Arizona, Colorado, and Nevada did not show the same levels of improvement in fatal crash and fatality rates as Utah.

"Utah typically has one of the lowest rates of impaired driving fatalities in the nation, but this study shows that all states have room for improvement. As our study shows, changing the law to .05% in Utah saved lives and motivated more drivers to take steps to avoid driving impaired. NHTSA conducts research on the effectiveness of countermeasures to improve safety on the nation's roads, and this study will be a useful tool for other States considering a move to .05%," said Dr. Steven Cliff, NHTSA's Deputy Administrator.

In 2019, more than 22% of those who drank alcohol indicated they had changed their behaviors once the law went into effect. The most common change was ensuring a sober ride was available when drinking away from home, an encouraging sign.

NHTSA also found none of the economic impacts that had been predicted with the change from .08% to .05%. Alcohol-impaired-driving arrests did not climb sharply after the law went into effect, as some had feared. In 2016, the last full year before Utah voted to change the law, 8,828 arrests were made. Under the new law in 2019, 8,512 arrests were made. Impaired driving arrest numbers in Utah have remained fairly consistent in recent years, except for a dip in 2018.

*Full report: [Evaluation of Utah's .05 BAC Per Se Law](#)*

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