

Alcohol and Driving Performance

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Alcohol has already acquired a leading standing in danger factors for the roadside safety (RS). This is confirmed by a number of studies performed in various countries [4-7]. The car accident (CA) rate analysis in relation with drunken driving within the period from 1986 to 1994, which we attempted earlier [1,3], revealed that alcohol abuse "contributed" a lot into the crash-related epidemiological situation in Kabardino-Balkaria. Thus, of the total CA number, 7.50-10.6% were due to alcohol abuse, which caused 5.3-10.8% and 9.5-11.6% fatalities and injuries, accordingly. Private vehicle drivers' faults led to higher CA frequency rates (70.0-76.6%) than those caused by drunken driving in commercial vehicle drivers (23.4-30.0%), and this may be accounted for by the inconsistencies and the shortcomings of the legislative and administrative basis that should, but so far does not, effectuate alcohol consumption control in vehicle drivers (VD).

Despite the noticeable decreasing trend of the main RS indices in Kabardino-Balkaria for the period 1991-1998 (the number of traffic crashes - 1107, that of killed - 286, injured -1232 in 1991, and, correspondingly, 672, 195 and 785 in 1995, and 542, 174 and 748 in 1998), the role of alcohol to thwart these tendencies, still remains very significant indeed. So, drunken driving led to 10.0% of CA cases resulting in 9.8% of fatalities and 10.5% of injuries in 1991, and in 1995 - 12.2, 11.1 and 13.7%, correspondingly, and also 14.1, 12.9 and 15,2% in 1998. Table 1 gives CA data, and crash-related consequences due drunken driving in 1994-1998.

Table 1. CA and their consequences through drunken driving

Year	Total CA	CA with drunken driving	Fatalities	Injuries
1994	755	69(9.1%)	22(9.7%)	98(10.8%)
1995	672	65(9.7%)	7(3.4%)	94(12.0%)
1996	718	51(7.1%)	13(6.7%)	73(8.7%)
1997	667	39(5.8%)	5(2.9%)	35(4.4%)
1998	626	32(5.1%)	8(4.3%)	38(5.0%)

Comparison analysis of safe driving performance (SDP) main indices, in 1994-1998, with those in analogous previous periods, shows that a positive dynamic trend has been maintained. It has to be admitted that there is a clearly seen domination (70.0%) of private vehicle drunken driving.

In 1991, police officers reported to have arrested 5 284 drunken drivers, and the number of the latter reached 12 171 in 1995, 16 846 - in 1998; meanwhile, the number of the private vehicle drivers was twice as many as that of the commercial vehicle drivers. The acuteness of the alcohol

problem and RS in the area is accentuated by the data of the Drunken Driving Test Center (in 1991 of the tested 5 382 drivers, 38.1% were found drunken; in 1995, correspondingly, 8 856 - 64.7%, and in 1998 - 9 568 - 69.5%) and that of the Regional Narcology Clinic (more than 400 drivers are on the records due to dipsomania, and 18-26 with illegal drugs).

Alcohol and illegal drug test in VD for the recent 8 years (table2) causes our special concern.

Table 2 Drivers' Test Results

Year	VD Total of drivers	Alcohol intoxication	DRUG intoxication
1991	5382	2052(38.1%)	3(0.05%)
1992	5149	2160(41.9%)	2(0.04%)
1993	9056	5167(57.0%)	18(0.19%)
1994	10187	6438(63.2%)	15(0.14%)
1995	8856	5728(64.7%)	12(0.13%)
1996	6841	4014(58.7%)	7(0.10%)
1997	5993	3597(60.0%)	4(0.06%)
1998	5762	3841(66.7%)	16(0.4%)
1999 (9 month)	4225	3328(78.7%)	30(0.7%)

This is an impartial manifestation of how the alcohol and drug problems are becoming a real threat in our area calling for a working out and effectuation of prophylactic measures to meet this danger. Actually, the VD number who are drunk at wheel is much larger than that officially given today. Therefore, that alcohol and driving are incompatible, has not yet been learnt well by all drivers.

SDP is being provided not only by the drivers but also pedestrians' adequate behaviour. Throughout the studied period, 18.0- 29,5% of the total CA due to the pedestrians' faults, were instigated by the drunken pedestrians.

These data manifest excessive alcohol consumption by the population of Russia as a whole to show inexpedience of the present dipsomania prevention methods, and particularly, drunken driving performance. Up to now, there is no adequate government programme to decrease the menacing flow of dipsomania and drug addiction in drivers. Meanwhile, this RS aspect is of vital importance, that is why the regional manifold programme "Safe Roadside" incorporates a set of measures to control alcohol abusage and illegal drugs in drivers and launch educational programme in the whole population both in adolescents and adults.

Taking into consideration the importance of alcohol cutover in VD for further SDP ensurance, practical recommendations are prepared on a manifold narcological examination of persons applying for driving licenses, and commercial and private vehicle drivers at the annual (or every 3 years) selection panels. The aforementioned proposals and those on prevention, have already

been presented for special attention of the officials in the Government and the Parliament of Kabardino-Balkarian Republic.

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