Alcohol with other drugs or medicines

The unforeseen effects of consuming even small amounts of alcohol in combination with other drugs or medications can reduce your ability to drive. Most medications will have warnings about alcohol consumption – mixing alcoholic drinks and prescription medicine or other illegal drugs can increase the effects of alcohol, and subsequently increase the risk of you crashing.

Current laws relating to drink driving

The ACT’s drink driving laws reinforce the message that drink driving is a serious offence. If the police charge you with a drink-driving offence, the matter will be dealt with by the courts.

Penalties for drink-driving offences include:
› disqualification from driving for a specified period,
› fines, and
› imprisonment.

What the ACT Government is doing

› Implementing awareness campaigns to emphasise the risks of drink driving, support police enforcement and improve community understanding of drink driving issues and their consequences.
› Supporting the ‘Responsible Service of Alcohol’ program.
› Conducting random breath tests by ACT Policing.

What You Can Do

› Don’t drink if you are going to drive.
› Remember that each person processes alcohol differently, based on factors such as age, gender and body metabolism.
› Understand that the body will need time to process alcohol, and that sleeping, drinking coffee or eating a meal will not speed up this process.
› Remember that medication and other illegal drugs in combination with alcohol can produce unpredictable effects.
› Plan your night – if you are planning to drink, then DON’T drive. Organise a lift, use public transport, hire a taxi, if in a group nominate a designated driver, or organise overnight accommodation.

To obtain more information on this or other road safety topics visit: www.justice.act.gov.au
The problem

Drink driving continues to be a major contributor to fatalities and injuries on Australian roads – over 1 in 5 drivers and riders killed nationally have a blood alcohol level exceeding the legal limit.

Drink driving is also an issue of great concern for the ACT, and ACT Policing continues to treat roadside breath testing as a priority, targeting the times and locations drink drivers are likely to be found.

However, despite these targeted police operations, a proportion of ACT motorists continue to drink and drive

› 1,313 persons were apprehended for drink driving during 2009/10.

How does alcohol affect driving?

Alcohol affects everyone differently. It is a depressant drug that affects most areas of the brain, and therefore affects a driver's ability to be totally in control of his or her actions.

Some effects of driving after alcohol consumption are:

› Reduced ability to judge speed or distance from other road users
› Reduced ability to concentrate and perform more than one task at a time
› Reduced ability to respond to situations or react quickly, especially in emergency situations, and
› Feeling sleepy and tired.

If you are not in control, you are not only endangering yourself, but everyone else on the road. It is important everyone understands that you don't have to be drunk to be affected by alcohol.

What is alcohol concentration?

Alcohol concentration is a measure of the amount of alcohol within the bloodstream – an alcohol concentration of 0.05 means there is 0.05 grams (or 50 mg) of alcohol in every 100 ml of blood.

Alcohol concentration is measured by analysing a sample of a person's breath or blood.

As a driver's alcohol concentration increases, so does the risk of being involved in a crash:

› At 0.05 → 2 times the risk
› At 0.08 → 7 times the risk
› At 0.15 → 25 times the risk

In the ACT, the legal alcohol concentration limit is

› 0.05 for all holders of a standard car or motorcycle licence, and
› zero for Special Drivers such as:
   – learner driver licence holders
   – provisional driver licence holders
   – restricted driver licence holders
   – drivers of heavy vehicles
   – drivers of public passenger vehicles (taxis, buses and hire cars)
   – persons providing driving instruction or supervision to a learner (including a heavy vehicle learner) driver

Police regularly conduct random breath tests on the roads, and this can be at any time of the day, and on any day of the week. Additional blood and urine tests can also be done if further testing is required.

Some people unfortunately still continue to believe that driving when 'only a little bit over' is okay, resulting in a number of drivers killed or seriously injured whilst driving with alcohol concentration levels at, or just over, the legal limit.

Staying under the 0.05 limit

A general guide for staying under the 0.05 alcohol concentration limit is to monitor the number of standard drinks you consume each hour.

A standard drink is defined as a drink that contains 10 g of pure alcohol.

Examples of standard drinks:

A – 1 middy of full strength beer (285 ml)
B – 1 glass of fortified wine (60 ml) (eg. port, sherry, madeira, etc)
C – 1 nip of spirits (30 ml)
D – 1 can (375 ml) of low alcohol beer
E – 1 small glass of table wine (100 ml)
F – 1 schooner of low alcohol beer (425 ml)

Most men can only safely manage two standard drinks in the first hour, and only one drink for every hour after that. Some men can manage less.

Most women can only safely manage one standard drink each hour. Some women can manage less.