

Issues of Substance 2009 Takes a Closer Look at Drug-impaired Driving in Canada

HALIFAX, November 15, 2009 – The Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse today announced that the issue of drug-impaired driving in Canada will take centre stage at an *Issues of Substance (IOS) 2009* special session on November 15 at the World Trade and Convention Centre in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

The special session, entitled *Drug-impaired Driving in Canada: Implications for Prevention and Treatment*, will provide attendees with a summary of the research related to drugs and driving, an overview of Canada's Drug Evaluation and Classification (DEC) Program, and an actual demonstration of a DEC evaluation.

Many Canadians may not be aware that Bill C-2, the *Tackling Violent Crime Act*—which passed in 2008—provides police with the authority to demand that a driver suspected of being under the influence of drugs submit to a Standardized Field Sobriety Test. In addition, the driver must participate in an evaluation of drug influence by an officer trained in the DEC program, and provide a sample of blood, urine or oral fluid to determine the type and extent of drug usage. Refusing to submit to any of these demands is a Criminal Code offence with penalties that are equivalent to those for an impaired driving conviction.

“Impaired driving in Canada is 100 percent preventable and yet the data suggests that up to 15 percent of drivers on the road have either alcohol, illicit substances or pharmaceutical substances in their systems,” said Doug Beirness, Senior Researcher and Policy Analyst, CCSA. “The DEC program and police officers trained as Drug Recognition Experts are essential resources of a system that enables police to accurately identify, and subsequently prosecute, drivers impaired by drugs.”

The DEC procedure, which enables officers to assess whether impairment is the result of drugs, follows a 12-step assessment protocol and is corroborated by toxicological evidence provided by blood, urine or oral fluid samples. This protocol, which generally takes 30–45 minutes, includes:

- A breath alcohol test
- Brief interview
- Preliminary observations and first pulse rate reading
- Eye examination
- Divided attention psychophysical tests
- Vital signs and second pulse rate reading
- Dark room eye examinations
- Assessment of muscle tone
- Checking for injection sites and third pulse rate reading
- Subject's statements and other observations
- Analysis and opinions of the evaluator
- Blood, urine or oral fluid sample



During the special session at IOS, attendees will see this 12-step protocol performed by a trained police officer and observe through video examples the different physiological changes the body undergoes to various illicit substances.

A study performed last year by CCSA of 1,349 DEC evaluations completed by Drug Recognition Experts (DRE) in Canada reported an overall accuracy rate of 95 percent. In other words, the DREs' evaluations and conclusions were subsequently corroborated by the fluid sample analysis 95 percent of the time, reflecting a high rate of accuracy associated with DEC procedures.

The impact of drug-impaired driving in Canada is significant:

- Epidemiologic studies of drug use among fatally injured drivers in Canada indicate that drugs are detected in up to 32 percent of fatally injured drivers
- A recent field study of night-time drivers conducted in British Columbia by CCSA noted that 10.4 percent of drivers showed evidence of recent drug use
- Data from CCSA's 2004 Canadian Addiction Survey reported that 4.8 percent of drivers in Canada admitted driving within two hours of using cannabis at least once in the past year

To learn more about IOS please visit: www.issuesofsubstance.ca.

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About CCSA:

With a legislated mandate to reduce alcohol- and other drug-related harms, the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse provides leadership on national priorities, fosters knowledge-translation within the field, and creates sustainable partnerships that maximize collective efforts. CCSA receives funding support from Health Canada.

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