

Drinking and Driving: How Much Will It Cost You?

You are hosting a holiday season party, and a friend says: “I’m fine to drive – I’ve only had a couple of drinks.” You do a quick assessment of the friend and think: “Yes, he seems okay to me – I’m sure he’ll get home safely.”

This scenario may ring a bell in many of our minds; most of us, as hosts, have watched party goers leave our homes with car keys in hand and haven’t thought much of it.

Well, the times they are a’changin’. More knowledge about the effects of alcohol on perception, along with a societal outcry about the damage drinking and driving can do, has prompted tougher laws regarding this offence, and it’s worth our while to pay attention.

The fact is, a couple of drinks may be enough to cause you to lose your licence, a consequence that has far-reaching consequences. Gail Berard, a Rehabilitation and Assessment counsellor in the Impaired Driver’s Program at Addictions Foundation of Manitoba (AFM), says that even a first time offence can cause havoc in our lives from many different perspectives.

“The impact of an impaired driving charge is devastating,” she says. “It affects people’s jobs, their financial situations, their relationships with family members, as well as their friendships and social relationships.”

Berard warns that many people take the wheel because they “don’t feel drunk,” or a host may let a guest leave because they “don’t act drunk.” In reality, impairment

occurs before the external indicators of impairment are exhibited.

Here’s another little known fact: a police officer can charge people with impaired driving even if their blood alcohol content (BAC) is below the legal amount of .08 per cent. “The first sign of impairment is the smell,” explains Berard. “If you are driving erratically, or if you are in even a minor accident, and the officer smells alcohol, you can be charged with impaired driving at the discretion of the officer.”



FIRST OFFENCE

If you are not convinced that an impaired driving charge can change your life, take a look at the financial consequences. If you are found guilty on a first offence:

- The fine will range from a minimum of \$600 to a maximum of \$2,000.
- Your vehicle will be impounded for one to two months, depending on your BAC.
- It will cost you \$400 to \$700 to get your vehicle back.
- Whether you are guilty or not guilty, as soon as you are charged you must undergo an alcohol and driving assessment at AFM at a cost of \$400.
- Your licence will be suspended for three months at the time of the charge, and if you are found guilty, a driving prohibition of one year begins. You will not be allowed to operate any type of motorized vehicle.

Once a licence suspension occurs, mayhem is quite likely to occur in your life. How do you get to work now that you can't drive? How much will the taxis and buses cost you? Worse, do you still have a job? If there is no way to get to your job without a car, or if your job responsibilities include driving, you may be forced to quit.

Now focus your attention on your family. You can no longer drive your son to soccer games and your daughter to ballet. You can't even drive over to the grocery store to pick up the week's supplies. Anything that involves driving must be taken over by a spouse or a significant other, causing stress in family relationships.

And what about friendships and social activities? Friends will quickly tire of being a taxi service every time a social event occurs.

UNDER THE LEGAL LIMIT

This holiday season, you may be stopped at a Winnipeg Police Service Check Stop. If you're found to have a BAC of between .05 and .08 per cent, your licence may be immediately suspended for 24 hours. There will be a \$40 fee for reinstatement of your licence. Also, you may face the above mentioned mandatory impaired driver's assessment at AFM at a cost of \$400 if you've had more than one 24-hour suspension in three years.

RESPONSIBLE HOSTING

The Manitoba Liquor Control Commission has published a booklet called *Host*, which provides ideas on planning parties and being a responsible host. You can prevent drinking and driving behaviour in your guests by following these tips:



- Keep non-alcoholic beverages on hand for non-drinkers and designated drivers.
- Serve high starch and protein rich foods. Avoid salty, sweet or greasy foods, which cause thirst.
- Serve drinks yourself rather than having an open bar.
- Use a shot glass and don't serve doubles.
- Serve non-alcoholic drinks during the last hour.
- Ensure that everyone has a safe ride home with a designated driver, in a taxi or on public transportation. If this is not possible, offer a bed.

Try these tasty non-alcoholic beverages at your holiday party. See MLCC's Mocktail Guide (available at liquor outlets) for more great ideas.

Johnny Appleseed

2 scoops vanilla ice cream
60 ml apple juice (2 oz.)
Splash of orange juice
Splash of soda
Maraschino cherry juice
Blend with ice until smooth.
Add maraschino cherry juice to tint. Serve in a champagne glass.

Sunset Cooler

120 ml cranberry juice (4 oz.)
75 ml orange juice 2½ oz.)
Splash of lemon juice
Ginger ale
Cranberries
Blend juice with ice until smooth. top with ginger ale.
Garnish with berries.

While a BAC of this amount probably won't net you an impaired charge, it does reveal how little one has to drink before the effects of alcohol can be identified. The point behind this legislation is that no amount of alcohol is the best choice when driving.