

Designating a Driver Should Be At the Top of Everyone's Super Bowl Party List

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- The I.I.I. Offers Tips for Being a Responsible Host
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NEW YORK, February 2, 2010 ? If you're planning to throw a Super Bowl Party on Sunday, remember that being a truly gracious host means more than putting out the baby-backs and beer. All hosts should make sure there are plenty of non-alcoholic options available and that the gathering includes a number of designated drivers, according to the Insurance Information Institute (I.I.I.).

On Sunday, February 7, millions of Americans will drive to a friend or family member's house to watch the Indianapolis Colts play the New Orleans Saints for Super Bowl XLIV. While the big game is one of the most exciting events of the football season, it is also one of the most dangerous as roads are filled with too many impaired drivers.

According to the most recent figures from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), in 2008, alcohol-impaired-driving crashes accounted for 32 percent of total motor vehicle traffic fatalities. On Super Bowl Sunday (February 3 to 5:59 a.m. February 4), 49 percent of the fatalities occurred in crashes in which a driver or motorcycle rider had a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) level of .08 or higher. Overall, more than 13,000 Americans died that year in crashes involving an impaired driver.

Young men?ages 21 to 34 years old?are the core audience for major sporting events such as the Super Bowl and are also the most likely to drive while intoxicated, according to NHTSA. They are also the most likely to drive fast and not wear their seatbelts.

?Those throwing a party where alcohol is served have both a legal and moral responsibility to make sure that their guests are capable of driving safely,? said Jeanne M. Salvatore, senior vice president and consumer spokesperson for the I.I.I. ?You don't want to allow anyone who has been drinking to drive a vehicle or ride a motorcycle while impaired. Not only do your guests risk injury or death to themselves or others, but *you* may be held financially responsible.?

According to the I.I.I., thirty-two states have enacted laws, or have case law, that hold social hosts liable if

they serve liquor to people who subsequently are involved in crashes that result in injury or death.

With the rise of citizen activist groups such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) in the 1990s, society has increasingly little tolerance for drinking and driving. Existing drunk driving laws have been strengthened and penalties increased.

Those convicted of drunk driving can also face huge increases in their auto insurance rates, which can more than double, noted Salvatore. Some insurers may also refuse to insure drivers with a history of impaired driving.

Fatigue is another potential problem. NHTSA statistics show that at least 100,000 crashes and 1,500 deaths each year are the result of drivers falling asleep at the wheel. A poll conducted by the National Sleep Foundation found that 100 million drivers, close to half of American adult drivers, drive while drowsy and nearly two out of 10 admitted to having fallen asleep at the wheel. New Jersey passed a law in 2003 that equates falling asleep at the wheel with reckless driving, and if a driver falls asleep and kills someone in a crash, he or she can be charged with vehicular homicide and serve up to 10 years in jail and pay fines. Although at least four states have considered similar legislation, New Jersey is the only state with such a law on the books.

A tired driver is quite simply not a safe driver, said Salvatore. And with the roads being more dangerous than usual on Super Bowl Sunday, drivers need to be especially vigilant.

If you are planning to host a party, the I.I.I. suggests the following:

- Encourage guests to pick a designated driver who will refrain from drinking alcoholic beverages.
- Be responsible yourself. Limit your own alcohol intake so that you will be able to judge if a guest has had too much to drink and should not get behind the wheel of a car.
- Provide plenty of non-alcoholic beverages for guests.
- Have an ample amount of food on hand. Drinking on an empty stomach causes quicker ingestion of alcohol.
- Do not pressure guests to drink or rush to refill their glasses when empty. And never serve guests who are already visibly intoxicated.
- Stop serving liquor at the end of the game's third quarter and switch to coffee, tea and soft drinks.
- Keep the numbers for local cab companies handy. If guests drink too much or seem too tired to drive home, call a cab, arrange a ride with a sober guest or insist that they sleep at your home.
- Remember, if you let someone drink and drive, you may be held liable if that person gets into an accident on the way home.

If you are attending a Super Bowl party or watching at a sports bar or restaurant:

- Designate your sober driver before the party begins and leave your car keys at home.

- Avoid drinking too much alcohol too fast. Pace yourself?eat enough food and alternate with non-alcoholic drinks.
- If you don?t have a designated driver, ask a sober friend for a ride home; call a cab, friend or family member to come and you; or just stay where you are until you are sober. Also find out if your community participates in a safe ride programsand keep the number handy.
- Buckle up?it?s a great defense against other impaired drivers.

Find more information on preventing drinking and driving on the MADD Web site, as well as NHTSA's Fans Don't Let Fans Drive Drunk Program.

The I.I.I. also has white papers on insurance and auto crashes, as well as on drunk driving.

The I.I.I. is a nonprofit, communications organization supported by the insurance industry.

Back to top