



Traffic Safety Facts Banner

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Evaluation of Half Price Taxi Rides To Avoid Driving after Drinking

In the most recent national telephone survey about drinking and driving conducted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the driving age public sees drinking and driving as a major threat to their personal safety (79 percent) and 86 percent felt it is very important to do something to reduce the problem (Traffic Tech 192). Legislation and enforcement emphasize the seriousness of driving while intoxicated (DWI). When people support anti-DWI behavior because it is the right thing to do and because DWI is not socially acceptable, there should be fewer instances of impaired driving in the first place.

The standards of behavior that members of a group accept and follow, called social norms, can affect impaired driving in both positive and negative ways. For example, social norms that place high value on conviviality and conformity to peer behavior might encourage people to drink heavily in situations in which they must drive. In contrast, a norm that places high value on acting responsibly and protecting others would encourage people to avoid impaired driving and to prevent friends from drinking and driving. NHTSA has researched issues such as the typical situations where impaired driving occurs most frequently, the decision-making processes that people undertake before they drink and before they drive, and effective ways to change and reinforce social norms (see Traffic Techs 94, 99, 130, 160).

In this study, the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE) assessed the impact of an alternate ride home for persons who wanted to plan ahead for instances when they may be too impaired to drive, specifically targeting persons between the ages of 29 and 49. First, they conducted a series of focus groups to examine perceptions, opinions, attitudes, and beliefs about impaired driving and explored attitudes about the importance of family, jobs, and friendships in making decisions about drinking and driving and staying in control. Five themes emerged that appeared to have some potential impact for persons in this age range to persuade them to make plans for alternative transportation in advance of drinking.

Five Potentially Salient Themes

- Responsibility for children*
- Health consequences*
- Embarrassment or shame about intoxicated behavior*
- Concern about employment consequences*
- Concern about harming others*

Workplace Program

The researchers chose a work place program because of the connection that exists between drinking and driving and potential negative consequences for workers' careers. Two firms in Dane County, Wisconsin agreed to participate in the program by promoting the program, called CareFare. Additional focus groups were conducted in both firms before and after special informative displays were posted at the companies. One employer was a bank and the other was a manufacturing company.

CareFare Half Price Taxi Program

CareFare is a half-price taxi program implemented to encourage potential drinking drivers to take taxis instead of driving themselves home after drinking alcoholic beverages. The DWI Program of the Dane County Sheriff's Office (DWI is called OWI in Wisconsin), Adams Outdoor Advertising, and the Union Cab Company developed the CareFare program in 1993-1994. Customers buy booklets of coupons worth \$20 that can be used as cash for taxi fare. They pay \$10. The coupons are valid every weekday from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. and all weekend for cab fares with the taxi company. There are no distance restrictions.

Real Behind the Wheel Messages

Madison, Wisconsin was selected as the site in part because the National Commission Against Drunk Driving (NCADD) had chosen the surrounding county as one of five places to develop and test anti-DWI driving strategies and messages. The Real Behind the Wheel program began in 1993-1994 and promoted these messages:

1. Real Men and Real Women drive real sober
2. Be man enough to give up the keys
3. Be smart enough to designate a driver in advance
4. Be strong enough to intervene and not let a friend drink and drive
5. Use CareFare

Those Who Used CareFare Used it Repeatedly

Despite the preference of most drivers to use their own vehicles, those who used the CareFare program used it repeatedly; the average user purchased nine booklets of coupons. This type of program appeared to have some appeal to persons who plan to drink (and possibly become impaired), but who plan ahead to avoid driving. The

administration of the program worked smoothly from the cab company's point of view.

Benefits and Drawbacks of the Program

The appeal of workplace based programs designed to prevent drinking and driving is that they are good business. Avoiding a crash is good for everyone, driver and employer alike. From an employer's point of view, lost time due to injury results in reduced productivity regardless of where or when the crash occurs. Some drawbacks were identified. One potential problem is that impaired driving is a sensitive issue when compared to other health concerns that might be addressed at the workplace. Issues like high blood pressure, for example, do not involve an illegal activity. The employers in this program expressed concern that providing CareFare coupons might imply that either they condoned heavy drinking or that they believed their employees habitually became too impaired to drive. The possibility that the coupons could be given to teenagers who might be dating or babysitting or at risk of riding with an impaired driver was viewed as providing a double message.

Surveys conducted after the program found that there was very little awareness of the program among employees of the two participating companies.

From the employee's point of view, concerns were raised that buying the coupon books from the employer exposed them to possible criticism by the employer who might assume that they were heavy drinkers or that they habitually drove while impaired. Many said they would prefer that the booklets be available for sale at local convenience stores.

The report includes extensive appendices with detailed reports of focus group findings of attitudes and beliefs about impaired driving. There are discussions of the differences between predominantly blue and white collar employees.

HOW TO ORDER

For a copy of *Exploring an Alternative Transportation Program to Reduce Impaired Driving*, (52 pgs plus appendices), write to the Office of Research and Traffic Records, NHTSA, NTS-31, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20590, send a fax to (202) 366-7096, or download from NHTSA's website www.nhtsa.dot.gov. Patty Ellison-Potter, Ph.D., was the contract manager.

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