

SEMCOG finds alcohol, young drivers don't mix

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

Alcohol is more frequently involved in young drivers' fatal traffic accidents than among older ones, a study from the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments shows.

Drivers in the 21-30 age group were involved in 25.9 percent of all crashes, but drinking drivers in that group were involved in 31.3 percent of crashes where drinking was detected.

Here are the numbers for other age groups:

■ 31-40 - in 23.1 percent of all crashes while drinkers were involved in 30.6 percent of all crashes.

■ 41-50 - in 16.8 percent of all crashes; drinkers were involved in 18 percent of all crashes.

■ 51-60 - in 8.9 percent of all crashes; drinkers were involved in 6.8 percent of all crashes, indicating alcohol was not as big a factor in accidents among this

group as among younger drivers.

■ 61-70 - in 5.3 percent of all crashes; drinkers were involved in 3.2 percent of all crashes.

The SEMCOG study involved calendar year 1996. Data were supplied by the Michigan State Police Office of Highway Safety Planning.

No meaningful comparisons of the skills of various age groups could be made because the numbers of drivers in each age group and their mileage weren't given.

The data also show only that drinking was involved, but not whether a drinking driver was at fault. Also, the state police data do not show how much a driver consumed or whether the driver was legally drunk. And the data don't show whether police agencies made a drunk driving arrest or obtained a drunk driving conviction.

But the study showed drinking was a bigger factor in some counties. In Washtenaw County, 50

percent of all fatal crashes involved drinking; in St. Clair, 42.9 percent; in Monroe, 40 percent; Wayne, 34.5; Oakland, 33.8; Macomb, 33.3; and Livingston, 29.3.

Seat belts and other restraints saved lives and reduced the seriousness of injuries, the study showed clearly.

Drivers using no restraints were involved in 4.4 percent of all crashes, 27.9 percent with incapacitating injuries, and 51.7

percent of fatal accidents.

Older drivers were particularly vulnerable. Drivers older than 60 were involved in 10 percent of all crashes but 22 percent of driver fatalities.

The number of crashes continued to increase though at a slowing pace. In 1993, the region reported 189,669 crashes; in 1994, up 11 percent to 210,348; in 1995, up 8 percent to 227,458; and in 1996, up 3.7 percent to 236,014.

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Careers project earning funding

An innovative program launched by Oakland County-based Operation ABLE of Michigan to help people find suitable jobs and learn to continually assess and upgrade their skills has received an important financial boost.

The boost came in the form of grants from the Detroit-based Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan, NBD Bank, Farmington Hills-based Compumare Corp. and other metro businesses.

Operation ABLE, headquartered in Southfield, is a nonprofit organization that specializes in employment, training and career services for businesses and mid-career adults.

In the past year, the agency launched the Career Resilience Project to help mid-career workers and job seekers acquire the skills needed in the changing world of work. This effort was begun in late 1996 with seed funds from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Chrysler Corp. Fund, the General Motors Foundation, the Ford Motor Co. Fund and a five-year grant from the Kelly Services Foundation. In July, Operation ABLE was awarded two grants totaling \$25,000 from the Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan and the Raymond C. Smith Foundation Fund.

As part of ABLE's campaign this summer to raise additional corporate funding, NBD Bank kicked in a grant of \$23,500 to provide career assessment, training and job placement services to low- and moderate-income people. Compumare Corp. contributed \$10,000 to the effort.

"This project addresses an urgent need facing many people in Greater Detroit," said Karen Belluomo, ABLE president. "Demographic and economic changes are drastically changing the way people find and keep jobs."

She cited the 1997-98 economic forecast prepared by the University of Michigan. It notes that people with the needed skills and knowledge are rewarded with attractive employment opportunities and higher wages.

To be successful and remain employable in today's world of work, said Belluomo, people must learn to constantly assess and upgrade their skills.

Through the Career Resilience Project and other programs, ABLE is helping people who are unemployed and underemployed by providing counseling, career skills assessment, job search assistance and computer training via learning centers in Detroit, Southfield and Sterling Heights.

For more information about Operation ABLE and the Career Resilience Project, call 1 (800) 922-HIRE.

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Officer receives MADD award

Meredith Salhaney of Birmingham, the only woman on the Milford Police force, received an award from the Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

This is the fifth year that Salhaney has received the Oakland County Lifesaver Award, given for helping to keep streets safe.