

It was dinner and our family was talking and laughing when the phone rang. My dad went to go get it. For some reason, things became quiet and I looked over to where he was standing in the kitchen. Maybe he had taken something with him to throw into the trash. Maybe he had found something in the kitchen to tidy up while answering the phone. But whatever the reason was, his foot was pushing the garbage can lid open and he didn't release it. That garbage can lid just stayed up and that was weird and something about that shiny metal cover that just didn't close felt awful.

My two little cousins, ages four and six, and my aunt had been in a car crash. They had been hit by an impaired driver who had died at the scene. They were alive. One cousin had a broken leg, the other one physically unscathed, but my aunt was struggling to survive.

My aunt suffered a broken nose, ribs, femur, ankles, and wrists. Reconstruction surgery with titanium rods in her leg and other metal throughout her body left her unable to walk. She underwent physiotherapy just to discover six months later that she had another larger issue. A herniated diaphragm left her intestines wound around her heart. She ended up with a double thoracic surgery that left her learning to walk yet again.

Years later, she has never been able to return to work as a middle school math teacher. She can't sit very long. She can't stand very long. She can't sleep at night and takes medication for both sleep and for her constant pain. My cousins continue to go to counselling.

This was all of this because of a young driver who decided to get into his car and drive under the influence. He has changed my aunt and my cousins' lives forever. He isn't even around to know the dire repercussions of his actions.

In order to combat impaired driving legislative measures must be taken to help drivers understand the risks of impaired driving and encourage responsible decision-making.

Legislative action combats the problem of impaired driving through creating systems that encourage responsible decision-making. One way in which it has done this is by setting a minimum-drinking-age law. In 1984, Congress raised the drinking age to 21, saving an estimated 31,959 lives (Covington 2021). Legislative action has also encouraged responsible driving through funding such as police training and technology that helps stop impaired driving. One such technology tracks a vehicle's location and movement when police are not able to engage in a chase. Some legislatures have also permitted this type of technology to be used at trial since it efficiently and effectively records the vehicle's movements (Careless and Neitzel 2020).

Legislatures have also encouraged responsible decision-making through consequences for impaired driving. For example, in many states, a first-time offense could be a short-term suspension of the license but repeat offenders could lose their license. First time offenders could also pay a penalty of a few hundred dollars but repeat offenses may reach over \$500 and possible legal fines although the court could also require the offender to reimburse the plaintiff for losses. First-time offenders could face incarceration for up to a year; repeat offenders could look at state prison. Criminal and even felony charges can be pressed for serious or repeat offenders. Repeat offenders may be court mandated by a judge to attend a rehabilitation program such as Alcoholics Anonymous. Some repeat offenders may end up in house arrest, having to submit to home monitoring and regular alcohol testing. They may also be required by a judge to work with a probation office and provide community service (LaMance, 2018).

Judges may also restrict vehicular use. They may impound the car at the owner's expense. They may also require the use of certain technology such as Vehicle Ignition Interlock Devices that require the driver to blow into a built-in breathalyzer device in order to start the car.

Legislative action may also allow insurance companies to increase the premiums of convicted offenders; in some states this can be an increase of over \$1,000 monthly. Convicted offenders can also lose the right to vote, to own a gun, and may even be deported when citizenship is an issue.

In conclusion, however much legislative action has been completed, there is still further to go. For example, due to reasons such as privacy, Texas and other states do not allow DUI checkpoints (Careless and Neitzel 2020). Many believe the standards are not tough enough for what constitutes impaired driving. Currently, that blood alcohol concentration level is under 0.08 percent as compared to Europe which is under 0.05 percent. The NHTSA has asked for a similar standard to be adopted in the United States. However, at this point, no state has made that change (Neighmond, 2014).

If we do not act now to combat reckless driving, stories like that of my aunt and my cousins will continue to abound. According to MADD (2020), impaired driving crashes are 100% preventable.

## References

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