Progress on Drunk Driving Plateaus

**N.M. Alcohol-involved Crashes**

- 1982: DWIs in N.M. gain more attention starting in the 1980s, with three deaths for every 100 million vehicles miles traveled. That rate is the country’s worst and almost twice the national average. To fight the problem, Gov. Bruce King creates the Task Force on DWI and Alcohol Abuse.

- 1992: New Mexico Attorney General Tom Udall releases a report with dozens of recommendations made by his DWI Prevention Task Force. Melanie Cravens and her three young daughters die after being hit on Christmas Eve by drunk driver Gordon House. Two of Cravens’ family members go on to fight DWIs. Legislation reforms DWI laws, including setting limits of 0.08 BAC for adult drivers and 0.02 BAC for juvenile drivers, and a grant program with $5 million. A checkpoint program also begins.

- 1999: New Mexico Legislature passes open-container law.

- 1998: Drive-up liquor windows are banned by the N.M. Legislature.

- 2002: A state law is passed to require ignition interlocks for everyone convicted of aggravated DWI or repeat DWI.

- 2008: New Mexico dropped out of the nation’s worst 10 states for the number of DWI fatalities per 100,000 population.

- 2016: New Mexico increases the penalty for drunk drivers in fatal crashes, allowing the sentences to increase from six years to 15 years.

**WHY THE CHANGES:** New Mexico passed its first law against driving while intoxicated in 1913. The punishment was fines of $25-500 and jail sentences of 30-90 days. A century later, after having one of the nation’s worst drunk-driving problems for many years, New Mexico now mirrors the nation by some measures. Rates plunged and then plateaued, for both the country and the state. A study by the federal government found that the national reduction in 1982-1997 and leveling off in 1997-2005 was explained by new laws (44% of the change), demographics (52%) and a small drop in per capita alcohol consumption (4%). Demographic factors cited were the decrease and then leveling off of drivers ages 19-34, and the increasing proportion, then leveling off, of licensed female drivers. The laws cited were those banning driving at 0.10 and then 0.08 BAC, those covering certain automatic revocation or suspension of driver’s licenses, those raising the drinking age to 21, and those requiring zero tolerance for drinking and driving by drivers under 21. Possibly another factor within New Mexico is that DWI arrests and convictions in the state have dropped steeply in the 2000s.