

Transcript of 3-minute .05 BAC video

Utah Representative Norm Thurston and
Dr. Bella Dinh-Zarr, Vice Chair, National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB)
discuss key points about a .05 BAC level for DUI – Feb. 10, 2017

Rep. Thurston: My first question, I hear from a lot of people that, “Well, .05 is really no big deal.” That “people are probably OK to drive at .05.” So, what is .05 in terms of impairment or what does it mean in terms of drinking?

Dr. Dinh-Zarr: Well, at .05 – which is about two or three drinks for an average male of 160 pounds –

Rep. Thurston: And by ‘drink’ are we talking about “Utah beer”?

Dr. Dinh-Zarr: No. Regular beer, outside of Utah. So it’s was probably a little more for Utah.

Rep. Thurston: So, four or five Utah beers.

Dr. Dinh-Zarr: A few more. And at that level you already start having impairment. So, in fact, when we look at the fatal crashes, **if you have a .05 – between .05 and .079 – you’re seven times more likely to be in a fatal crash.**

Rep. Thurston: Wow. So that’s a significant increase in the risk of causing an accident.

Dr. Dinh-Zarr: Absolutely.

Rep. Thurston: Then let’s talk a little bit about policy and the impact on deterrent effect. When we’ve looked at other places that have made changes, lowering their alcohol levels, is it a law-enforcement effect or is it more of a deterrent effect on the drivers? What are we seeing in the studies?

Dr. Dinh-Zarr: Well that’s an interesting thing. Sometimes we only focus on that little area between .05 and .079 because the current law is .08. But **what really is important is that this is a broad deterrent; it’s a preventative measure. People’s behavior changes when there is a .05 BAC law. They just tend not to drink and drive as much.** So if they’ve been drinking, we’re not measuring their/our BAC levels at every moment so people just realize that they need to not drive after they’ve been drinking. Actually, in some psychological way, **it separates drinking from driving because people stop driving and they choose other forms of transportation or they choose not to get behind the wheel.**

Rep. Thurston: Okay, so that I understand, when I read the studies, what I’m seeing is that the prediction would be somewhere around an 11% decrease in everything. So there’s some sort of a reduction in probability that anybody who drinks when they drive, whether they’re at a low level or at a high level. Does that sound about right?

Dr. Dinh-Zarr: It’s actually **an 11% decrease in deaths, if you have a .05 law.** And what’s interesting even more is if you look at other countries – and about 100 of them have a .05, or lower, law – there isn’t a decrease in the drinking; there’s just a decrease in the number of people who were *killed* in alcohol-impaired crashes.

Rep. Thurston: Another concern some people have raised is, “Why do we just want to round up a bunch more people and put them in jail? Isn’t that what this bill is going to do is just say, ‘Law enforcement, round ‘em all up and throw ‘em in jail?’” What do the studies show in terms of arrests, incarceration; in terms of the law-enforcement results on this?

Dr. Dinh-Zarr: **When there is a change in a BAC law – so we saw that from .10 to .08 – there actually was little or no change in the number of DUI arrests.** What happened is people just stopped getting behind the wheel when they were impaired. And the projections and the studies in other countries have shown that at .05 and below there will not be any burden on the criminal justice system.

Rep. Thurston: That’s very helpful. And thank you for your time and thank you for coming to visit the Utah Legislature.

Dr. Dinh-Zarr: Thank you. It’s great to be here.