

Drunk driving in Finland

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Committing a drunk-driving offence

According to the Finnish criminal law, the driver of a motor vehicle commits a drunk-driving offence if their blood alcohol level during or immediately after driving is a minimum 0.5 per mille, or if a breath test shows a minimum of 0.22 mg of alcohol per liter of exhaled air. The limit for aggravated drunk driving is 1.2 per mille or 0.53 mg, respectively.

Drunk-driving punishments

Drunk driving is an offence punishable by a fine or a maximum of six months of imprisonment. Aggravated drunk driving is punishable by a minimum of sixty unit-fines or a maximum of two years of imprisonment. If the driver has also committed negligent bodily injury or negligent homicide, the punishment will be more severe. Authorities can also withdraw the offender's right to drive and detain their driving license either temporarily or permanently. The offender may also lose their right to receive traffic and car insurance payments. The offender is liable for all investigation and court fees as well as for the insurance payments paid by the insurance company to third parties and for the damage inflicted to passengers traveling with the offender.

Drunk driving in road traffic

In Finland, alcohol plays a part in about one in four fatal traffic accidents and in about one in nine accidents leading to injuries. Yearly, some 80 people are killed and 900 people injured due to drunk driving.

The accident risk increases rapidly as the blood alcohol level rises. Clinical tests have demonstrated that drivers' ability to divide their attention and to monitor moving targets is already impeded when their blood alcohol level surpasses 0.2 per mille. On average, the risk is three times as high when the blood alcohol level is 0.8 per mille and forty times as high when it surpasses 1.5 per mille.

According to roadside investigations, every 800th driver commits a drunk driving offence and every 180th driver has an amount of alcohol in their blood that is below the legal limit.

Every year over 20,000 drunk drivers are caught. Over half of them commit aggravated drunk driving. According to a survey conducted by the Finnish Road Safety Council, Finns consider drunk driving to be the most serious traffic offense.

A drunk driver's profile

Of the drunk drivers that are caught, over half are heavy drinkers and a third have a diagnosed substance addiction. Half of first-time offenders will commit drunk driving again, and about half of all drunk drivers are re-offenders. The risk of a re-offender to commit drunk driving after being caught is 3 to 5 times higher than that of a first-time offender. In recent years, apprehended drunk drivers have been offered low-threshold help in order to make a rapid intervention. One effective method to prevent drunk driving is an alcolock. Instead of having their right to drive withdrawn completely, a drunk-driving offender can ask for a monitored right to drive with a vehicle with an alcolock.

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