



LAST DRINKS

WARRNAMBOOL

Media Release

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Alcohol and vehicles make a killer cocktail on and off our roads, police caution

Alcohol and high speeds are not the only killer cocktail on the region's roads, with new figures from Warrnambool's Last Drinks project showing death and injury are just as likely in low speed incidents when alcohol products are in the mix.

The data, collected from emergency department visits at Warrnambool Base Hospital, also reveal many motor vehicle accidents involving alcohol happen on farms and other private properties.

The figures come as the region's police urge drivers to take care on the roads this Labour Day long weekend.

Warrnambool Police Road Safety Manager Sen. Sgt Chris Asenjo said holiday weekends meant more people were out socialising and travelling on regional roads, increasing the risk of alcohol-related road smashes.

"Driving a motor vehicle is one of the most dangerous things a person can do, and if you add alcohol to the mix the chances of trauma are very significant indeed," Sen. Sgt Asenjo said.

According to TAC data almost one in five road fatalities had a blood alcohol content over 0.05.

Sen. Sgt Asenjo said the 0.05 blood alcohol figure did not relate to a person's feeling of intoxication, but rather their level of physical impairment – whether they are aware of it or not.

"They may have gone out, had a few drinks and done the right thing by getting a lift home. But then they get up the next day and don't realise that alcohol hasn't broken down yet and they may still be over the limit," he said.

"That's why we do alcohol testing in the mornings, because you might not feel drunk but you can still be impaired to the point where you will not have proper control of a motor vehicle."

Last Drinks data collected at Warrnambool Base Hospital's Emergency Department shows one in 14 attendances for injuries from motor vehicle and motorcycle accidents involved alcohol, with a high number of these involving low-speed incidents. Many cases resulted in serious neck, head and spinal injuries with long-term impact on the individual and their families.

Some of these incidents occurred on private properties with no other motor vehicle involved.

Sen. Sgt Asenjo said the section of the Road Safety Act relevant to drink driving does not relate only to driving on public roads.

"Whether you are driving in a driveway, paddock, camping ground, park, in a reserve or on a road, drink driving provisions are applicable to you," Sen Sgt Asenjo said.

“If you are affected by alcohol products and your driving kills or injures someone on a road or private property, you will be subject to prosecution in the Courts.”

Sen. Sgt Asenjo said getting behind the wheel after consuming alcohol not only puts the driver at increased risk of road trauma, but also passengers and other road users who have the right to go about their business safely, and emergency workers who often know the victims.

“For people to be silly enough to have a few drinks and get behind the wheel, you really have to be a bloody idiot.”

He encouraged Warrnambool locals and visitors to have a good time over the holiday weekend, but to take care and know police are doing all they can to keep impaired drivers off the roads.

“Fatal and serious injury motor vehicle collisions are really significant in the fact that they change a person’s life forever and affect families and emergency workers,” Sen. Sgt Asenjo said.

“Look after yourselves, look after your family and look after that person driving behind you or coming the other way, and please don’t drive a motor vehicle if you’ve consumed alcohol or drugs.”

Last Drinks Warrnambool is part of the Driving Change trial running in emergency departments across Victoria, NSW and the ACT until 2021. As part of the project, which builds on a pilot study run in Warrnambool in 2014, hospitals gather information on alcohol-related presentations, including time and location of drinking, injuries and weapons used.

The data is used to create practical ways of reducing harm from alcohol products within the community. The project adapts the highly successful “Cardiff” model for violence and injury prevention pioneered in the UK by Professor Jon Shepherd.

Anyone wanting help to cut down or quit can call DirectLine confidential alcohol and drug service on 1800 888 236, Turning Point live online counselling at www.counsellingonline.org.au or contact their GP.

Available for interview:

Warrnambool Police Road Safety Manager, Senior Sergeant Chris Asenjo.

Project hashtag: #LastDrinksWarrnambool **Project web site:** <http://lastdrinks.info>

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Last Drinks data is collected by the Driving Change Project, which is administered by Deakin University with funding provided by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC; APP1113693), St Vincent’s Hospitals Australia and support provided by the Australasian College of Emergency Medicine. The dissemination of the Last Drinks data collected by South West Healthcare as part of the Driving Change Project is supported by VicHealth and the Warrnambool Violence Prevention Board.