

## Press-Information

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10,000 lives could be saved each year!

Largest European Expert Congress considers alcohol and drugs in road traffic

At the International *Fit to Drive* Congress in The Hague (Netherlands), traffic experts are demanding an overall European strategy in the fight against alcohol and drugs. Traffic psychologists and medical practitioners are meeting for the fifth time for the largest interdisciplinary exchange of experience in Europe regarding the way human beings behave in road traffic.

The experts estimate that around 10,000 people die in Europe each year as a result of road traffic accidents where alcohol plays a part. In Germany, around 22,000 accidents involving alcohol were registered in 2009, of which 440 led to death. During 2009 in Germany, 56,000 people had to undergo a medical and psychological examination because of drink driving and altogether the police identified 200,000 cases of driving while under the influence of alcohol. However, experts consider that this is only the tip of the iceberg: for each drink-driving offence which is discovered, around 600 remain unrecognised. This corresponds to a detection risk of 0.16 per cent.

The good news is: the number of accidents involving alcohol has fallen in recent years. "This is certainly due to reduced alcohol consumption as values within society have changed," explains Dr. Klaus Brüggemann, Managing Director and Member of the Executive Committee of the Association of the TÜVs (VdTÜV e.V). "Especially in Germany, the fact that ever more drivers are acting responsibly and drawing a strict dividing line between drinking and driving is testimony to the success of the medical and psychological examination drink drivers have to undergo." However, experts are concerned about increased drug abuse on the part of drivers. In Germany alone, the proportion of assessments for drug abuse within the examination has increased by 9,4 per cent within one year.

At the 5th *Fit to Drive* Congress, the experts are therefore asking for an effective pan-European strategy in order to intensify the fight against driving whilst under the influence of alcohol or drugs. "It is clear from the large number of undetected cases that the police are reaching their limits as regards checking drivers", says Dr. Brüggemann. "That is why the *Fit to Drive* Congress is particularly concerned with preventive measures to ensure that drivers do not get behind the wheel when under the influence of alcohol." The experts agree that rehabilitation based on a medical and psychological examination must remain open for drink drivers. However, no Europe-wide strategy has been in existence up to now. Intensive consideration of their own behaviour makes it possible for drivers to re-enter the driving community and reduces the risk of reoffending.

With the *Fit to Drive* Congress, traffic psychologists and medical practitioners from all countries in Europe are supporting the European Commission in its aim of halving the number of traffic deaths from its present total of around 35,000 by the year 2020. In addition to psychologists and doctors, those taking part will include driving instructors, police officers, teachers, members of the legal profession and also representatives of official bodies, working together on establishing the status quo and developing concepts for the future. Dr. Brüggemann: "In view of the considerable challenges involved in drink driving we can and want to conduct this exchange of experience at an international level and we are consciously taking an interdisciplinary approach."