

# The Argus

## **Drugs and drink a deadly cocktail on roads**

One in ten death crash drivers in Sussex had taken both drink and drugs, The Argus can reveal.

Research by traffic police showed either alcohol, drugs or both were involved in a fifth of fatal or potentially fatal accidents in a two-year period.

As police are calling for easier ways to prove drivers are under the influence, campaigners say drug use by young people is causing increasing concern.

Sussex Police's road policing unit examined tests from 137 crashes where people were killed or seriously injured in 2005 and 2006.

The six-month project showed that in 20 per cent of accidents at least one of the drivers had drink or drugs in their bloodstream.

Of those, 46 per cent involved a combination of drink and drugs - just under one in ten of all fatal or potentially fatal road accidents.

Where drugs had been taken, cannabis was found in more than half of blood samples.

Superintendent Paul Morrison said: "Every one of these accidents is a tragedy that could have been avoided if drink or drugs had not been used.

"The concern for us is there is a number of people out there who are using substances that impair their driving."

The average age of drivers in the study who had taken drugs was 19, while the average age of drivers taking drink and drugs in combination was 22.

Tony Dring, of the Campaign Against Drink Driving, said: "A lot of youngsters nowadays will not drink and drive but don't give a second thought to drugdriving.

"It is an increasing problem."

He said drugs such as cannabis were dangerous not only because they affected performance but because their strength was impossible for drivers to predict.

He said: "Taking alcohol and drugs in combination is quite frightening. The potential for killing or injuring innocent people is devastating."

Five teenagers killed in a car crash in Hastings in October 2005, had been taking cannabis. Barrie Mackay, 15, Danielle Martin, 16, David Carwardine, 16, Kelly Goring, 17 and Lee Morgan, 14, all died in a stolen Rover Metro

in Battle Road, St Leonards.

A forensic toxicologist told their inquest: "If they used cannabis within three to four hours there would be a risk of their driving being affected.

"I consider it unsafe to drive if you have smoked cannabis.

"Cannabis is a drug that slows the body down. It slows down reactions. It slows co-ordination." Thomas Hope, 24, from Crawley, had alcohol and cannabis in his bloodstream when his Ford Mondeo left the road at Turners Hill on August 25, last year.

At his inquest, coroner Roger Stone said: "Cannabis's role in many accidents is often played down but in my view it can have serious consequences."

Theresa Clarke, 28, from Uckfield, was jailed for four years for causing death by dangerous driving.

Three of her friends died when she crashed while driving them home from a pop festival after taking ecstasy although tiredness was a significant factor.

Her car veered off the M25 at 80mph when she fell asleep in 2006.

Supt Morrison said police need practical ways of testing for drug use at the roadside in the same way breathalysers were used for drink-drive suspects.

He said: "We need a technological solution to roadside drug testing which is Home Office approved. That would help enormously."

Prescription drugs such as codeine can also seriously affect driving ability.

And the effect of some prescription drugs on driving can be hugely magnified if they are combined with a small amount of alcohol.

Supt Morrison told The Argus police need new powers and greater clarity to tackle the problem.

He said: "It is a problem that we need to have more understanding of.

"Legislation may need to change in order to address issues of prescription drugs as well as illegal drugs."

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