Proposal Essay: Essay, Research Paper

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Organizations, sobriety checkpoints, and stricter laws to decrease

the death toll in alcohol related car accidents

The huge auditorium is filled with grim-faced teenagers who sit in complete silence as the family of the young girl struggle to finish what they have to say. Photographs are displayed on the stage; a girl smiling on a swing, in the sand at the beach, and laughing with her friends. Who would have thought that this girl would be among the 25,000 people killed by drunk drivers a year in the United States. The students sit silently watching the couple grieve for their child, many feeling guilty and embarrassed; each of them have heard of or are friends with people who have driven while intoxicated. Yet, few teenagers think that it could ever happen to them.

In 1991, a boy named Jason was racing friends and driving drunk. They all thought they were having a good time, but that all changed in a split second when he caused a crash that claimed the life of his 15 year-old sister, Erin. Jason’s actions resulted in him being convicted of vehicular manslaughter, and being sent to prison for a 6-year period. Jason was one of the lucky ones. Unfortunately, his younger sister Erin was not.

Every twenty-two minutes a person is killed in an alcohol-related motor vehicle crash. On average, 25,000 lives are lost each year in the United States due to drunk driving, and it is estimated that five thousand miles of alcohol-impaired driving occur for each arrest. While only one out of the two thousand drivers with a blood alcohol level of .10% or higher is arrested, drunk driving is a serious crime, and severe measures must be enforced to solve it. Sobriety checkpoints; breathalyzer tests at bars, clubs, and parking garages; stricter penalties; and more informative organizations are all ways in which problem can be solved.

Although young people are less likely to drive than adults are, teen accident rates are substantially higher than those of adult drivers. Half of all car accidents-which are the leading cause of death among teenagers-involve alcohol. In 1996 nearly 7,800 drivers ages 16-20 were involved in car accidents in which people died. Although none of these drivers was old enough to drink legally, 23% had been driving under the influence of alcohol. One way in which we can decrease the number of alcohol related accidents with teens is to establish more organizations to teach students the consequences of driving drunk, as well as helping students cope with peer pressure. One such organization is S.A.D.D, Students Against Drunk Driving. In September of 1981, a small high school in Wayland Massachusetts experienced a tragic loss. Two well-known high school students died within a week of each other in alcohol related crashes. Responding to the deaths of two of his students, Robert Anastas started the organization. Run primarily by high school students, SADD focuses on reducing the number of alcohol-related driving accidents and helping students resist peer pressure. Since the development of SADD in 1985, the number of drunk driving accidents went down 14%, the largest drop for any age group during that time. By establishing more organizations like SADD around the country, teens will be less likely to drive drunk, and fewer teens will take part in social drinking.

While organizations in which people learn the consequences of drunk driving and ways to avoid peer pressure may work for the adolescent part of society, what about the adults who already know these consequences and choose to drive drunk anyway? In these cases, the government needs to provide better treatment and longer sentences to those who are caught. Alcoholics Anonymous has been proven to work best for most adults and should serve as a treatment base. However, transfers to such places definitely can not happen immediately. Those caught drinking and driving should only be transferred to treatment centers after a minimum of 30 days in a correction facility. This would serve as a “wake up call” for people who are capable of risking their lives, as well as the lives of others.

Leonard Zailskas, founder of Braintree Alternative Center Substance Abuse Program, feels that in order to protect society from potential damage such individuals can do on the road; drunk drivers should be given significant jail sentences followed by mandatory alcoholism treatment, and aftercare with Alcoholics Anonymous.

Another possible solution to the problem of drunk driving in the United States is sobriety checkpoints on Friday and Saturday nights. This plan could be implemented in many ways. First, policemen could situate themselves at certain points along streets and highways, and pull people over at random to check and make certain that they are not under the influence of alcohol. This way we could attempt to stop the problem before the accident occurs, rather than waiting for the inevitable. People found to be driving while under the influence will be subject to fine, arrest, or imprisonment, accompanied by a suspension of their license. Thus, rather than waiting for the accident to occur before getting these people help, we can eliminate the threat in the first place. Also, for those who might contemplate “having a few drinks” before driving, there is now a possibility that they may get pulled over at random and be subject to arrest. Sadly, many people only become concerned when there is a possibility of arrest, and fail to consider the other consequences of driving drunk.

Along with police officers randomly pulling cars over, other sobriety checkpoints need to be established in bars, clubs, and even parking garages. By requiring a breathalyzer test before being allowed to leave such places, many people would be more inclined to assign designated drivers, or make the decision not to drink. Some bars already have installed voluntary breathalyzer machines by the door encouraging those who have drank to make sure that they are of the legal limit before getting behind the wheel. One such bar is located in Boulder Colorado, and has installed a machine next to the exit for public use. It should become a law that bars and clubs have these machines either by the door or behind the bar. Also, an effective proposal would be putting breathylzer machines in city parking garages. Before leaving the lot one must take the test before the bar will rise. In the instance that the person is above the legal limit the bar will not rise and security will see that the person remains in their custody until their blood alcohol level is below the legal limit. This would no doubt serve as another preventive measure against untimely deaths due to drunk drivers, and frighten people out of attempting to drive while intoxicated.

Many people feel that these proposals will be too costly, and a waste of taxpayers’ money. Indeed, treatment facilities, helpful organizations, and countless breathalyzer machines would require large amounts of money. But, everytime a drunk driver causes an accident society pays in more than just money. Along with the money spent on the officers, ambulances, and doctors; people pay the ultimate price: their lives. Moreover, as drunk driving accidents increase, insurance premiums rise for guilty and innocent alike, costing taxpayers even more money. So, while the cost of these proposals are of concern to many, they should consider the amount of money already being wasted on drunk driving accidents as it is. Also comes the argument of how can people put a price on safety. The lives of yourself and loved ones are the ultimate price to pay.

Therefore, it is obvious that drunk driving is a major problem in society today, and present solutions are proving ineffective. Individuals who do not act responsibly and drive while under the influence of alcohol, along with the denial toward the true danger of driving drunk are the causes of this problem. If it is not solved, the number of innocent people who are killed by these acts of stupidity will only increase, neighborhood streets and busy intersections alike will be dangerous places for people to drive, and accidents that occur as the result of drunk drivers will continue to permanently disable and emotionally traumatize those “fortunate” enough to survive the crash. Although stricter punishments, sobriety checkpoints, and more informative organizations will not eliminate the problem entirely, they prove extremely effective in reducing the number of people who die annually from alcohol-related motor vehicle accidents. Drunk driving is a serious problem in society, and to ensure the safety and reduce the fear of citizens an effective solution must be implemented. If not innocent people will continue to die for no reason – in fact, in the time it took to read this paper, someone will die in an alcohol-related crash.