

**PRESS COVERAGE  
OF THE  
1994 LEGISLATIVE CHANGE  
IN THE  
DRINK-DRIVING LAWS  
IN IRELAND**

**CONOR McLERNON**

**RAY BATESON**

**Dr. MARY HYNES**

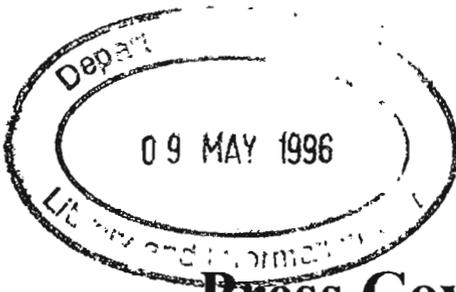


Dublin Healthy Cities

QNU S : UOA D

009519

"QNU 3 = UOA D"



**Press Coverage  
of the  
1994 Legislative Change  
in the  
Drink - Driving Laws  
in Ireland**

---

Conor Mc Leron

Ray Bateson

Dr. Mary Hynes

1

2

**Dublin Healthy Cities Project** is a World Health Organisation initiative. Its aims are to promote a co-ordinated approach to improving the physical social and mental well-being of city dwellers, by a partnership which includes local government, statutory and voluntary sectors with active involvement of citizens in decisions affecting their health.

**Dublin Healthy Cities** is promoted by:

Dublin Corporation, Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown Co. Council, Eastern Health Board, Fingal County Council, Health Promotion Unit, South Dublin County Council,

**Dublin Healthy Cities** employs 40 people under FAS Community Employment schemes.

# **Press Coverage of the 1994 Legislative Change in the Drink - Driving Laws in Ireland.**

## **Introduction**

The three major causes of death in Ireland are heart disease, cancers and accidents. From ages 1 to 34, accidents are the leading cause of years of potential lives lost (Hayes, Doorley, *et al*, 1992). Road accidents caused 404 deaths in 1994 (Garda statistics), while a report by the Health Research Board found that 75% of all motorist fatalities had excess alcohol in their blood (Walsh, Bofin, *et al*, 1986).

In order to reduce the carnage on the roads and bring Irish law into line with that of other EU countries, former Minister for the Environment Michael Smith, TD, introduced new legislation which came into force on the 2nd December 1994. Under this legislation, the legal blood alcohol maximum for drivers was reduced from 100 mg per 100ml to 80 mg. per 100ml. A first conviction of being over the new limit carried an automatic two year driving ban, possible fines of up to £1,000 and a requirement that the motorist then had to take a new driving test. Blood and urine specimens could now be collected from drivers in hospitals, thereby closing a legal loophole by which they could take refuge in hospital casualty departments.

The new legislation provoked fierce public debate, particularly since it was introduced during the festive season over which it was reported to have been strongly enforced. In response to mounting pressure to do so, the present Minister for the Environment, Brendan Howlin, T.D., on the 7th March 1995, announced proposals for amending the legislation by introducing graded penalties, his decision to amend the legislation having already

been reported in the press in late January 1995. He remained firm, however, on retaining the new 80mg legal limit, stressing that it was still the highest in the EU.

This debate, which took place in all forms of media was not just confined to accidents and accident prevention, but extended to the role of alcohol in Irish social life and Irish attitudes towards alcohol consumption. Newspapers played an important role in both reporting on and influencing this debate.

### **Purposes of the Study**

- To outline the main arguments in the debate on the legislation as reported in the newspapers.
- To review the press coverage on the new legislation over the period surveyed.
- To determine the significance accorded to the press coverage, in terms of the number of articles of different kinds and the space allocated to them.
- To determine how favourable, or unfavourable, the articles were in regard to the new legislation.
- To examine how newspaper coverage of the legislation over the period surveyed reflected the attitude of Irish people to drink.

### **Methodology**

Four of the national daily newspapers were used in the study, the **Irish Independent**, the **Irish Press**, the **Irish Times** and the **Evening Press**.

An 11 week period was surveyed from the 1st December 1994 to the 14th February 1995 inclusive, including a three-week period following the announcement of the decision to amend the legislation..

When an article about the new drink-drive legislation was found, the following details were recorded: paper date, page number, article type (news, feature [journalist column or news analysis], editorial, letter, adverts, other), column inches, article tone, article headline and article summary.

Column inches were generally estimated visually. A broadsheet page of newsprint was assumed to be 18 inches in length by 8 columns wide (144 column inches). A 'tabloid' page was assumed to have dimensions of 12 inches in length by 6 columns wide (72 column inches).

The article tone was recorded as positive if it was generally in favour of the new legislation, negative if it was generally against, or neutral if its position was unclear or mixed. In summarising the articles, particular attention was paid to recording the principal arguments for and against the new law and the various groups involved.

The criteria for assessing the tone of the articles were as follows:

**Positive:**

- Articles reporting comments and/or the activities of individuals or groups generally in favour of the legislation in its original form.

- Articles generally in favour of the legislation in its original form, but regarding any suggested amendments as being constructive or fair.
- Articles reporting opposition to, or misgivings about amendments on the grounds of road safety being jeopardised.
- Articles suggesting that the legislation did not go far enough;
- Articles in which the positive health, social, and economic aspects of the legislation were emphasised.
- Articles suggesting that the legislation was vigorously enforced.

### **Negative:**

- Articles reporting comments and/or activities of individuals or groups generally opposed to the legislation in its original form.
- Articles generally opposed to the legislation in its original form and urging amendments to it, or its repeal.
- Articles reporting criticism of thinking behind new law.
- Articles in which negative health, social and economic aspects of the new legislation were emphasised.
- Articles in which it was suggested that the law was too zealously or unfairly enforced.

## **Neutral:**

- Articles in which the position on the new law was unclear or mixed.

## **Results**

**Numbers of articles & space devoted to press coverage.**

**A total of 448 articles were found.**

As **Table 1 (appendix 2)** shows, the largest number of articles found were news items. The second largest were letters and the third, features. **Table 2 (appendix 2)** however, shows that while the largest amount of space was still given to news items, features came second and letters third. The smallest number of articles were editorials. Adverts were almost exclusively for non-alcoholic beer while other articles were mainly reviews. **Table 1 (appendix 2)** shows that the **Irish Times** had the largest number of feature articles while the **Irish Press** had the lowest.

**Figure 1 (appendix 3)** shows the total number of articles found for each week of the survey. The number of articles was found to reach a peak in the week beginning the 29th December. Following this, the number declined. A smaller peak was found in the week beginning the 19th January.

**Figure 2 (appendix 3)** shows the amount of newspaper space devoted to the drink-drive legislation for each week of the survey. The amount of space similarly reached a peak in the week beginning the 29th December, followed by a decline, but with two smaller peaks in the weeks beginning the 19th January and the 2nd February respectively.

## Tone of press coverage.

**Tables 3 and 4 (appendix 2)** show that the only types of articles giving a generally favourable impression of the new legislation were adverts and editorials. More letters were negative than either positive or neutral while most features were negative. The articles of columnists were the least favourable amongst the features. Articles of type "other" were fairly evenly divided between positive, negative and neutral coverage.

The results reveal a very varied response to the legislation. The week-by-week breakdown of results, illustrated in **Figures 3 to 5 (appendix 3)**, reveal that only in the first and last weeks of the survey were articles generally positive with regard to the legislation. Positive coverage was generally low throughout most of December. This corresponds with the introduction of the legislation, complaints from vintners, hoteliers, and restaurateurs about business, fears about Irish social life and the manner of policing the law - all this in the lead up to the Christmas and New Year festivities. Coverage was somewhat more positive, early in the New Year, corresponding to the analysis of the road traffic accident statistics, but dropped again in the period leading up to the protest march to the Dail on the 24th January and the announcement of the intention to amend the legislation. This corresponded to a temporary reversal in an overall decline of press coverage, following the Christmas - New Year period, as indicated in **Figures 1 and 2**. This phase was followed by a strong increase in positive reporting, up to the end of the period surveyed.

## Opposition to the legislation.

### Groups.

The main groups found to be opposed to the legislation in its original form were; The Vintners Federation of Ireland (VFI); the Licensed Vintners Association (LVA); the Irish Hotels Federation; the Restaurants Association of Ireland; the Garda Representative Association (GRA); and a growing number of Dail deputies (particularly those in rural constituencies).

### Main issues.

Issues raised by those opposing the new legislation fell into six main categories: the inflexibility and unfairness of the legislation and its policing, its impact on trade and employment, its social impact and the undue emphasis on the role of alcohol in road traffic accidents, the lack of effect on car insurance premiums and the difficulties of arranging alternative transport particularly in rural areas.

Issues raised in relation to each of these issues are outlined below. Numbers in brackets refer to newspaper articles described in Appendix 1.

### **Legislation & its policing inflexible and unfair:**

- Old limit should be restored (8, 18, 50).
- Call for graded penalties (10, 17, 26, 34, 35, 37).
- New limit arbitrary - relationship between alcohol consumed and blood alcohol level varies widely between individuals (42).

- Gardai over-zealous in its implementation - under pressure to achieve greater detection rates - while other sorts of crime go undetected (10).
- Law inflexible - "criminalises" the two pint drinker, who is treated the same as someone who has drunk 10 - 12 pints (13, 48).
- Outcry over morning checkpoints (46, 51).

### **Fall off in trade and employment:**

- Trade has been severely hit (16).
- Massive lay offs of staff anticipated (16, 18).

### **Socially unacceptable:**

- Draconian law will ruin Irish rural social life (49, 52).
- No social consensus in favour of the new laws (55).
- Law will lead to heavy home drinking (13).

### **Over-emphasis on impact of drink on road traffic accidents:**

- Road deaths statistics questioned (6, 36, 44, 51).
- Too much attention being given to drink driving - there are many other causes of road accidents not as severely penalised (40, 42, 56).

## **Car insurance will not be reduced:**

- Insurance companies will not deliver on lower premiums (32).

## **Transportation difficulties:**

- Inadequate or expensive alternative transport, especially in rural areas (18, 51, 53).

## **Support for the new legislation.**

### **Groups.**

The main groups or individuals found to be in favour were; The Minister for the Environment; the Coroners (in particular Mayo Coroner, Dr Michael Loftus); the Irish Medical Organisation; Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD); the Garda Federation; the Garda Commissioner; the Irish Insurance Federation (IIF); the Automobile Association (AA) and the National Safety Council.

### **Main issues.**

Those who favoured the legislation suggested that the legislation was reasonable and that a change in social attitudes was underway or necessary. They drew attention to the potential impact on road traffic accidents, the potential for lower insurance and medical costs and proposed solutions to transport difficulties.

Issues raised in relation to each of these issues are outlined below. Numbers in brackets refer to newspaper articles described in Appendix 1.

## **Legislation reasonable & should remain strict:**

- Courts and police have discretion (5, 12).
- Graded penalties would invite legal challenges (20).
- Garda Representative Association comments "irresponsible" (11).
- Legislation only brings Ireland into line with the EU (54, 57).
- No watering down of the legislation (19, 24, 30).
- Hope that law will be enforced all year round - not just at Christmas (23).

## **Change in social attitudes underway or necessary:**

- Debate highlights misuse of alcohol (3, 33, 45).
- We have an ambivalent attitude to drink (39, 56).
- One simply should not drink and drive (23, 41, 47, 56).
- Change in Irish pub culture needed (27, 38).

## **Impact of drink & new legislation on road traffic accidents significant:**

- Road carnage will be significantly reduced (5, 56).
- Drivers at the old limit are at a much greater risk of being involved in an accident than at the new level (27).

- Most road deaths alcohol related (24, 32).
- Reduction in fatalities over the Christmas period welcomed (14, 25).

### **Lower insurance & medical costs:**

- Law will reduce car and accident insurance premiums (28, 31).
- Will lead to savings in the medical services as well (15).

### **Solutions to transport difficulties:**

- Review of taxi shortage (29).
- Pubs should provide their own transport (41).
- Drinking groups should designate non-drinking driver (20).

### **Discussion**

#### **Considerable Press Coverage.**

The coverage given to the drink-drive debate was considerable. According to Laffoy (1994), over a six month period in 1993, total coverage of road traffic accidents in the **Irish Independent**, the **Irish Press** and the **Evening Press** combined, amounted to just 298 articles, most of them factual reports, compared with a combined total of 272 articles in these newspapers in the 11 weeks of this survey.

## **Primarily Mixed or Negative Response to Legislation.**

Most of the coverage was mixed or negative. This seems to be due to:

- An early vigorous campaign mounted by those opposed to the legislation.  
It would appear that the campaigners seeking to have the laws amended or repealed were more effective in gaining publicity than those in favour of the legislation. Indeed since this survey was completed, and at the time of writing, the vintners had not stopped campaigning: they were seeking to have the proposed amendments to the legislation applied retrospectively to those convicted under the 1994 Act.
- A less vigorous, less united and more defensive campaign mounted by its supporters.
- Tolerant rural social attitudes to drinking and driving.
- Strong Irish pub culture.
- Outcry over new limit - even though it is still the highest in the EU.
- Widespread misgivings over inflexibility of penalties.
- Failure of Garda to present a united front over policing.
- Editorial views sometimes at odds with those of columnists, who wrote either as individuals, or on behalf of motorists or the farming community.

Even the papers themselves would appear to have sent conflicting messages: the few newspaper editorials were strongly in favour of the new legislation and of drinking less and more responsibly, but their columnists were often less enthusiastic.

### **"Hysteria" surrounding legislation.**

Press coverage suggested a vigorous, but sometimes passionate and unreasoned debate on the legislation, in which public ignorance of the issues seemed to be manipulated by both sides. This seems to be due to:

- Concern of vintners about loss of jobs, trade and profits as a result of the new legislation.
- Equally strong concern about death and injury on the roads as a result of drink driving.

### **Examples:**

- Outcry over morning checkpoints. Fear of early morning checkpoints was exploited by anti-legislation campaigners. However, in December 1994, only 26 out of nearly 3,300 motorists breathalysed were breathalysed in the morning. Of these 26, 5 were subsequently arrested, but only one of these resulted from a routine morning checkpoint. (The Sunday Tribune, 5/2/95).
- Selectivity in the use of road accident statistics in highlighting or diminishing the impact of the new legislation on reducing death and injury on the roads (5, 6, 32, 50, 36). The last article (36), failed to take into account the reduction

in accidents since the start of the road safety campaigns in the 1990's.

- Little public information given on the amount of alcohol that would need to have been consumed to put a person over the limit, and when it could again be legally safe to drive. It was an issue the vintners exploited and led to widespread fear and complaints about early morning checkpoints. More could have been done by the Department of the Environment to provide information, but it may have feared that by setting limits in terms of, for example, pints consumed, it would have been encouraging people to drink up to those limits. In addition, the relationship between the amount of alcohol consumed and resulting blood alcohol level can be complex.
- It could have been more strongly argued that driving was impaired at both 100mg and 80mg, but the press coverage suggested that the debate was about other issues.

It was remarked in the papers by one in favour that the current "hysteria" surrounding the new legislation is only "temporary". This may account for the decline in press coverage in the new year. However, this decline may also be interpreted as representing a victory of sorts for the anti-legislation campaigners, following the announcement in January of the Government decision to amend the legislation to allow for graded penalties.

### **Role of press coverage.**

The considerable amount of press coverage is likely to have raised public consciousness about the issues of drink-driving and alcohol abuse. While the papers reflected the conflicting views of the general public, vested interests, editorial and columnists, none of

the papers presented a strong unified stance either for or against the legislation.

Research has shown that people obtain more information on health matters from the media than any other source. The print media has played an important role in the understanding and adoption of healthy lifestyles by the population. Serious consideration should be given to encouraging and developing a similar approach in the area of alcohol consumption, drink-driving and accident prevention.

### **Recommendations**

- 1. A more effective campaign to educate the general public on accident prevention, alcohol consumption, and drink-driving, should be mounted.**
- 2. The press should be encouraged to promote accident prevention the way other health issues, such as active living and nutrition, are promoted.**
- 3. Need for more effective Government campaigns when drafting future legislation.**

The survey suggests that if any Government department is to bring in other legislation in the future that may be controversial, a much more co-ordinated and coherent campaign in favour of the legislation should be put in place before it is introduced.



## Appendix 1: Chronological Cross-section of Press Coverage.

### • News Items

1. **Evening Press 2/12/94, *DRINK - DRIVING BLITZ UNDER WAY***. New legislation was introduced. 35 checkpoints were in operation around Dublin in the first four hours of the new regulations. MADD said that this was a great day in the battle against drink-driving.
2. **Irish Independent 5/12/94, *GARDA'S DRINK-DRIVE CLAMPDOWN TAKES EFFECT***. Hundreds of Garda checkpoints around the country, as the new law took effect.
3. **The Irish Times 6/12/94, *REPORT HIGHLIGHTS DRINKING BY UNDER -10 S***. Article concerning report by the Southern Health Board on alcohol and drug abuse. Stricter legislation and enforcement of drink-driving penalties had encouraged more moderate and responsible drinking amongst adults.
4. **Irish Press 8/12/94, *REVELLERS SNARED AT CHECKPOINTS***. Early morning checkpoints caught 'morning after' revellers, and that Garda warned that dawn checks would be a strong feature of the clampdown.
5. **Irish Independent 15/12/94, *DRINK-DRIVE CHANGES WILL SAVE LIVES SAYS MINISTER***. The Minister for the Environment said that the new law would save lives and courts have discretion to take account of particular circumstances.

6. **Irish Independent 16/12/94, DRINK CLAIM 'MISLEADING'**. The VFI was reported as saying that the Environment Minister's claim that 60 lives a year would be saved as a result of the new legislation were "totally misleading".
7. **Irish Independent 17/12/94, RESTAURANTS 'HIT BY DRINK REFORMS'**. The Restaurants Association of Ireland complained about the adverse effect on member's trade. In the same article, the VFI said that the Gardai were in danger of losing community support, and also criticised advertising of public transport. The VFI said that this advertising was an insult to rural areas where there was no DART or taxis available.
8. **The Irish Times 21/12/94, PUBLICANS TO PETITION ON DRINK LAW**. VFI planned to organise a national day of protest on January the 24th. Federation sought restoration of the 100mg limit and would petition customers.
9. **The Irish Independent 22/12/94, CALL FOR GRADED DRINK PENALTIES**. Major lobbying campaign of TD's would get under way. VFI called for graded system of penalties. Sales of non-alcoholic beers and wines soared.
10. **Evening Press 22/12/94, EASE DRINK LAW GARDAI URGE**. The GRA claimed that gardai were under pressure to get results, due to a new staff assessment system. The Association also called for graded penalties and maintained that gardai should have discretion in dealing with drivers. It said that people did not know if they were under or over the limit and it wanted early morning checkpoints scrapped.

11. **The Irish Times 23/12/94, CULLIGAN SAYS GRA VIEWS ON DRINK-DRIVING 'IRRESPONSIBLE'**. The Garda Commissioner replied that these remarks were "totally irresponsible", and that the function of the Gardai was to enforce the law as enacted.
12. **The Irish Times 23/12/94, PEOPLE 'SCARED OUT OF THEIR WITS' OVER DRINK-DRIVE LIMITS**. Straw poll of Gardai around the country on the policing of checkpoints. Clare gardai, for example, said that early morning checkpoints were an anti-crime operation - not only related to drink-driving. Gardai in Limerick said that there was no question of promotion on the basis of arrests, while gardai in Louth assured that discretion was nothing strange to them - people with alcohol on them were advised not to drive. The reporter was told that the new law had not resulted in any more arrests.
13. **Irish Press 23/12/94, LAW 'CRIMINALISES' THE TWO PINT DRINKER**. Deputy Jim Higgins wanted a return to the old limit and said that the law was criminalising the two-pint drinker. He also that the law was forcing people to imbibe at home and as a result we were leading ourselves into a situation of social and domestic chaos.
14. **Irish Independent 24/12/94, HOLIDAY ROAD DEATHS SET TO DECLINE BY 10 SAY GARDAI**. Pat Costello, of the National Safety Council welcomed the fall. He went on to claim that the new limit was working and that the hysteria about the new limit was "temporary":

15. **Irish Press 24/12/94, DRINK: ROAD TOLL HALVED.** Road accidents treated at State's two main casualty hospitals were halved since legislation was introduced. The IMO said that the reduction in the limit was fully justified in the light of the major drop in road traffic cases. A consultant at St. James's Hospital noted significant reductions which could also see big savings in the economy generally. Beaumont Hospital consultant reported substantial savings and reduction in pressure on Casualty Department. St James's Hospital said that there was no problem with requests from Garda doctor for blood samples in drink-driving cases.
16. **Evening Press 26/12/94, BIG JOB LOSSES AFTER PUB TRADE DISASTER.** VFI warned of large scale lay-offs because of disastrous trade. It said that people were terrorised by the law and afraid to come to the pub
17. **The Irish Times 27/12/94, CROSS PARTY AGREEMENT EMERGING ON FLAWS IN DRINK-DRIVING LAWS.** New drink-driving laws should be changed, said TD's from different parties.
18. **Irish Independent 27/12/94, PUBS PETITION MINISTER AS ROW ON DRINK LIMIT GROWS.** Vintners warned of closures and job losses. VFI announced that a petition was to be handed in to the Minister for the Environment on January 11, and a National day of protest was to be held on January 4. VFI told Tourism and Trade Minister "forget tourism". Rural TD's and Senators lobbied to have 100mg limit restored. Lack of transport in rural areas evident over the past few days. There were demands by vintners for an extension of public transport. Bookies also urged a more realistic limit. Their trade was also reported to be down.

19. **Irish Independent 29/12/94, GOVT TD'S IN REVOLT ON DRINK-DRIVING PENALTIES.** Spokeswoman for MADD was against changing the law, saying that a reduction of 8 deaths to 3 proved their point.
20. **The Irish Times 29/12/94, SMITH VICTIM OF ABUSIVE CALLS OVER HIS DRAFTING OF DRINK DRIVING LAW.** Former Environment Minister, Michael Smith received "ferocious and abusive" telephone calls over the new drink driving law. He answered his critics: \*It's overlooked that judges have discretion. \*Graded penalties had been considered, but would invite legal challenges "on the margins". \*Difficulties of rural drinkers could be solved by one person in a group being designated as a driver. \*Pubs not so important that we have to have had the level of accidents we had. \*Link between fatal accidents and alcohol intake proven scientifically.
21. **Evening Press 30/12/94, MEDICS SUPPORT DRINK LAWS.** Doctors had come out powerfully in support of the new drink driving law. In the same article, insurance companies said that a sliding scale of penalties could have implications on the heavy premium loading put on drivers after a drink-driving conviction.
22. **Evening Press 31/12/94, NEW LAWS 'NOT STRICT ENOUGH'.** Reported that of coroner's records from 1980-1990, of 142 road traffic fatalities, 31 of these were due to drink.
23. **Irish Press 31/12/94, DOCTORS ARE FULLY BEHIND DRINK RIGOUR.** Reported Comments by the IMO. Welcomed decision by Brendan Howlin to change the limit. Key to success was enforcement. People shouldn't drink and

drive. Driving impaired with a blood alcohol level above 80mg -even on the morning after the night before. Hoped that enforcement campaign would reduce road deaths all year round. A sliding scale of penalties would be fairer - but penalties must be a sufficient deterrent to stop people drinking and driving. Replying to publicans about the destruction of rural life, the Organisation said that we're just going to have to change our lifestyle, get a lift home and drink less.

24. **Irish Independent 31/12/94, DOCTORS WOULD BACK 'SCALED BUT TOUGH' PENALTIES.** The North Mayo Coroner, Dr Mickey Loftus claimed that 31 out of 42 road deaths on his records were totally due to drink. The IMO said that sliding scale penalties would have to be severe enough to be a sufficient deterrent.
25. **Irish Independent 2/1/95, ROAD CRASH TOLL FALLS AS NEW LAW BITES.** Statistics were reported as being down on Christmas 93, but up on Christmas 92. Minister for the Environment, Brendan Howlin, however, described these figures as "very positive".
26. **The Irish Press 4/1/95, HOWLIN TO REVIEW LAWS BUT HOLDS FIRM ON LIMIT.** Protests against the new law would be discussed at cabinet meeting that day. Environment Minister determined to stick to the new limits, but would listen to arguments for graded penalties.
26. **Irish Press 4/1/95 (news), FEWER CRASH FATALITIES 'JUSTIFY NEW LAW'.** Former Environment Minister, Michael Smith defended the new legislation. He said that it had received a lot of public support and was justified if it helped to save lives. Laws were needed to change the drink

culture in Ireland. He said that road accidents were "by far the biggest killer". There was an undisputed relationship between drink-driving and accidents and the risk of accidents was 20 times more likely at 100mg than at 80mg and 10 times more likely at 80mg than at zero. Aspects of the legislation gave the courts the same discretion they always had. We are now at the *high* norm of alcohol limits.

28. **The Irish Press 4/1/95, DRINK LAW TO CUT CAR INSURANCE PREMIUMS.** The Hibernian Group said lower accident rates could yet reduce motor insurance rates - if they were a continuing trend.
29. **Irish Press 10/1/95, MAJOR REVIEW ON TAXI SHORTAGE.** A major review of how taxis operate in Dublin aimed at getting rid of the dire shortage of cabs during peak periods was currently before the Department of the Environment.
30. **Irish Times 11/1/95, HOWLIN URGED TO MAINTAIN PENALTIES FOR DRINK-DRIVING.** IIF met Minister Howlin the previous day. Federation urged him to maintain penalties for drink driving, and the new alcohol limit. Christmas road deaths were reported as being down 7 on Christmas 93. Garda check points were reported as up 30%, but arrests down 40%, on those of the previous year.
31. **Irish Independent 11/1/95, CAR COVER CUT 'IF LOWER ROAD DEATHS TREND CONTINUES'.** IIF made promise that lower accident rates could reduce insurance rates if they continued to fall.

32. **Irish Independent 12/1/95, 75PC DEATH CRASH DRIVERS OVER THE LIMIT.** Health Research Board survey, revealed that 3/4 of Dublin motorists killed in the 1980's were over the new limit. Figures claimed to accurately reflect driver fatalities countrywide. Kildare Country Coroner said that figures prove that the new laws should not be repealed and stressed that we cannot be out of line with the EU. The VFI was quoted as saying that fatalities in Ireland had decreased consistently since 1972, "but the public should not hold their breath for lower insurance premiums". It said that premiums continued to rise during this period.
33. **Irish Independent 17/1/95, PRAISE FOR DRIVING LAW.** Reference was made to Dothain, an organisation set up to highlight the misuse of alcohol, which was reported as welcoming the reduction in road deaths following the introduction of the new laws. The organisation praised the laws as the problem of alcohol abuse was now raised in people's minds.
34. **Irish Independent 21/1/95, GRADED PENALTIES ON DRINK DRIVING.** Government was ready to bring in graded system of penalties, but only when legal loopholes were ironed out.
35. **Evening Press 24/1/95, PUB OWNERS MARCH ON DAIL.** 3,000 protesters marched to the Dail that day.
36. **Evening Press 25/1/95, NEW DRINK LAW FAILS TEST - BIG-BLOW TO SAFETY LOBBY.** Total casualties on the roads (deaths & injuries) for last December were quoted as 957. These were described as the fifth worst since 1968. Went on to say that the yearly swings in the December

figures made it impossible to draw any firm conclusions and that the figures made it unlikely that the insurance industry would reduce their invoices.

37. **Evening Press 25/1/95, DRINK-DRIVING LAWS TO BE AMENDED.** The Government was expected to amend the laws by introducing a sliding scale of penalties. Labour sources believed the public were becoming more sympathetic to the new laws. Cross party support for maintaining the new limits, but restoring the old limit unacceptable. However the VFI was considering withholding VAT payments if its demands were not met. (These included a return to the old limit, and discretionary powers to be given to the Gardai).

38. **Irish Independent, 3/2/95, EU STUDY CALLS FOR FURTHER CUT IN ALCOHOL LIMIT.** Report issued by the European Transport Safety Council accused the Irish of being the worst session drinkers in Europe in that they drink relatively infrequently but heavily and called for an EU-wide maximum limit of 50mg.

• **Letters**

39. **Irish Press 6/12/94, OUR ATTITUDE TO YOUNG DRINKERS.** Author said that we have an extremely ambivalent attitude to drink and called for a ban on alcohol advertising. Went on to say that ads glamourise drinking so that teenagers feel that they cannot enjoy themselves except through drink. Letter said that the new laws were to be welcomed and that the dangers of alcohol should be recognised by all ministers.

40. **The Irish Times 10/12/94, *DRIVING OVER THE LIMIT.***  
The author asserted that obsession with the new drink-driving limit was blinding us to other factors contributing to dangerous driving.
41. **The Irish Times 14/12/94, *DRINKING AND DRIVING.***  
Reductions in the legal limit on the continent had led to commensurate reductions in road traffic accidents. It was nonsense that the new legislation would ruin social life or put publicans out of business. Publicans could provide transport for customers. Simply, don't drink and drive.
42. **Irish Independent 6/1/95, *LOGIC WAS NEVER USED TO DRAFT THIS LEGISLATION:*** The author admitted that people driving with alcohol represented an increased risk, but so did other categories of drivers. He asked was a driver who had taken 3 pints more dangerous than an unlit trailer on a dark country road, a car with bald tyres, or a driver that was speeding?. The author also quoted a scientific report, the Davitt Report, which showed that the consumption of a given amount of alcohol had widely varying effects on different individuals, and thereby argued that the new limit was arbitrary.
43. **The Irish Times, 10/1/95, *DRINKING AND DRIVING.***  
Quoted statistics of the Health Research Board for road traffic fatalities in the 1980's, which revealed that 3/4 fatalities over the present limit. The author estimated that that 30 people would have been saved had these people been more circumspect or not drunk at all.
44. **Irish Independent 13/1/95, *TIME TO OUTLINE THE HARD FACTS.*** Questioned contention by former Environment Minister that a person with 100mg/ml blood

alcohol is 10 time more likely to have an accident than someone with 80mg/ml. Would like to know more about basis of statistics. Author said that the survey was a French study: it did not take into consideration Irish social factors.

45. **Irish Press 18/1/95, TORTURED RESPONSE TO DRINK LAW SIGN OF ALCOHOLIC THINKING.** The author suggested that the social and cultural life of the country was already severely affected by alcoholic thinking never mind the new drink laws. The author used the laws as a springboard to say that we needed discussion on the social implications of alcoholism and hoped the debate on the laws would lead to this.
46. **Evening Press 19/1/95, DRINKING AND DRIVING.** If people were not drunk after only one pint, why prohibit them from driving?. It could be implied from the life-saving arguments in favour of lowering the limit that it would be better to ban all drinking and driving - should we then ban people on tranquillisers and antidepressants?. Author criticised morning checkpoints - were there any statistics to suggest that breathalysing in the morning saves lives?. Letter quoted statistics of the Health Research Board: Dr. Walsh did not know if alcohol was the cause of the accident -was this sufficient justification for lowering the limit?. Author urged us to let reason prevail -you are not drunk on two pints.
- **Features (Journalist column)**
47. **Irish Independent Kate Cruise O'Brien 20/12/94, THE SPIRITS SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN IN THE DRIVER'S CHRISTMAS.** Kate Cruise O' Brien strongly argued that it

was better not to drink and drive at all, and that people had no right to put the lives of others at avoidable risk.

48. **The Irish Times *An Irishman's Diary* 14/12/94.** In this article Kevin Myers condemned the law as rigid and draconian. He said that prudence, commonsense, and assessment of guilty intent were set aside. He maintained that there had been few objections, because "High Moral Ground" had dominated the law's discussion in the Dail.
49. **Irish Independent *Farming* 3/1/94.** Author advised people to wear protective clothing when out walking, because the draconian law had driven cars off the road. It went on to complain that rural life and tourism had been hit.
50. **Evening Press *Top gear* 14/1/95, *DEAD DRUNK.*** A motoring column. Health Research Board report was referred to. It quoted statistics indicating that of 87 drivers checked, 59 were over 100mg and only 6 between 80mg and 100mg. It concluded that the figures rather supported stronger policing of the *old* limit.
51. **Evening Press 25/1/95., *SILLY SEASON.*** Author was critical of adverts for public transport and of letter writers who sought to diminish the transportation difficulties of rural dwellers. Author disputed proof that that the law was working because of reductions in fatalities over last year: the fact that there were so many could be seen as proof that it wasn't. It wasn't drink alone that was responsible; the mixture of drink and speed was lethal. Article said that decent, hard-working people may lose their livelihoods after being convicted the morning after a few drinks the night before.

- **Features (News Analysis)**
52. **Irish Independent 17/12/94, *A QUIET NIGHT IN A COUNTRY PUB***. Quoted complaints from customers in a country pub: "You don't always plan to go out for an evening ...you might just decide that you'd like a few pints.. this is extremely unfair to us", "We don't abuse drink ...only two or three pints and a laugh", "This has been too great an intrusion on our lives".
  53. **Evening Press 22/12/94, *THE GREAT DUBLIN TAXI ... FAMINE***. Article said that the tougher drink-driving laws had forced 1000's of Xmas revellers to leave their cars at home, but the reporter found it impossible to get a taxi.
  54. **Irish Press 28/12/94, *DRINKING DRIVERS - HOW THE REST OF EUROPE COPE***. Little comfort for Irish drivers. Republic was unique in having 100mg limit. Trend was for even lower limits in Europe. There were automatic alcohol tests for people who have accidents. However, drivers were fined rather than deprived of their licences in some European countries. In Northern Ireland the 80mg limit had applied for some years now. As a result rural drinking patterns had altered radically with small town hackney services increasing rapidly to meet the new demand. Penalties for other EU countries were listed.
  55. **Irish Independent 30/1/95, *FAILURE TO OBEY COULD SCUPPER THE LAW***. It was argued that there was no consensus about how the legislation should be changed and that society was not adjusted to the new laws.

- **Editorials**

56. **Irish Press 24/12/94**, 50% reduction in road accident cases treated at two of the State's main casualty hospitals puts into perspective the almost hysterical reaction to the new limit and Garda enforcement campaign. There was unqualified support for the legislation from the IMO chairman. Much of the current controversy stemmed from the traditional ambivalence to the drinking driver. The principle that one should not drink and drive had not been accepted. The answer to concerns about the legislation was not to rescind or emasculate it but to fine tune it so that the real culprits wouldn't find a loophole in the sense of unfairness felt by the wider community.
57. **The Irish Times 31/12/94**, Said that the reductions in deaths justify the Act, and that the alcohol level was now only in line with the EU. It went on to say that it was unthinkable that we should alter these limits in the interests of pubs or restaurants, or because of arguments about rural lifestyles. However, it went on to say that arguments about the failure of enforcement of the law at the old levels had a point. It also said that other causes of road traffic accidents should be dealt with.

- **Adverts**

Adverts that appeared to have been published in response to, or as part of, the anti drink-drive campaign were recorded. These were found to be mainly for non-alcoholic beer. For example:

58. **The Irish Times 20/12/94**, *SAFETY IN NUMBERS. NO ALCOHOL, NO LIMITS*. Ad. for Kaliber.

- **Other**

Mainly review articles.

The reporting by the local press of the drink-drive legislation was reviewed by Kathryn Holmquist in **The Irish Times** in *Paper Round*.

Thus in *Paper Round* 2/1/95, the **Limerick Leader** had a headline, *PUBLICANS REPORT BLACK CHRISTMAS*, and the **Echo**, *DRINKERS TERRORISED*. However, the **Donegal Democrat** highlighted the fact that many people had been spared a "black Christmas", because as a result of the new law they were not being terrorised by drinkers. Under a headline entitled *TRAGEDY-FREE CHRISTMAS*, possibly referring to concern at the possible consequences of increased off-licence drinking, it was reported that the number of drink-driving detections were down, but serious criminal activity and family drink-related problems were at an all-time low.

## Appendix 2.

**Table 1. Number of references by article type.**

PAPER	NEWS	EDITORIAL	LETTERS	FEATURES		ADVERTS	OTHER
				Journalist column	News analysis		
E. PRESS	40	0	16	9	2	1	2
I. INDO	64	1	39	4	9	3	3
I. PRESS	58	2	12	0	5	0	2
I. TIMES	52	2	84	11	6	5	16
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>23</b>

**Table 2. Space given to references by article type (column inches).**

PAPER	NEWS	EDITORIAL	LETTERS	FEATURES		ADVERTS	OTHER
				Journalist column	News analysis		
E. PRESS	650	0	141	188	237	15	14
I. INDO	890	5	332	89	532	70	36
I. PRESS	879	18	116	0	200	0	14
I. TIMES	571	32	348	190	134	63	132
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2,990</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>937</b>	<b>467</b>	<b>1,103</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>196</b>

**Table 3. Tone of articles by article type (number of references).**

ARTICLE TONE	NEWS	EDITORIAL	LETTERS	FEATURES		ADVERTS	OTHER
				Journalist column	News analysis		
POS.	62	3	55	4	3	8	7
NEG.	68	1	71	16	13	1	7
NEUT	84	1	25	4	6	0	9

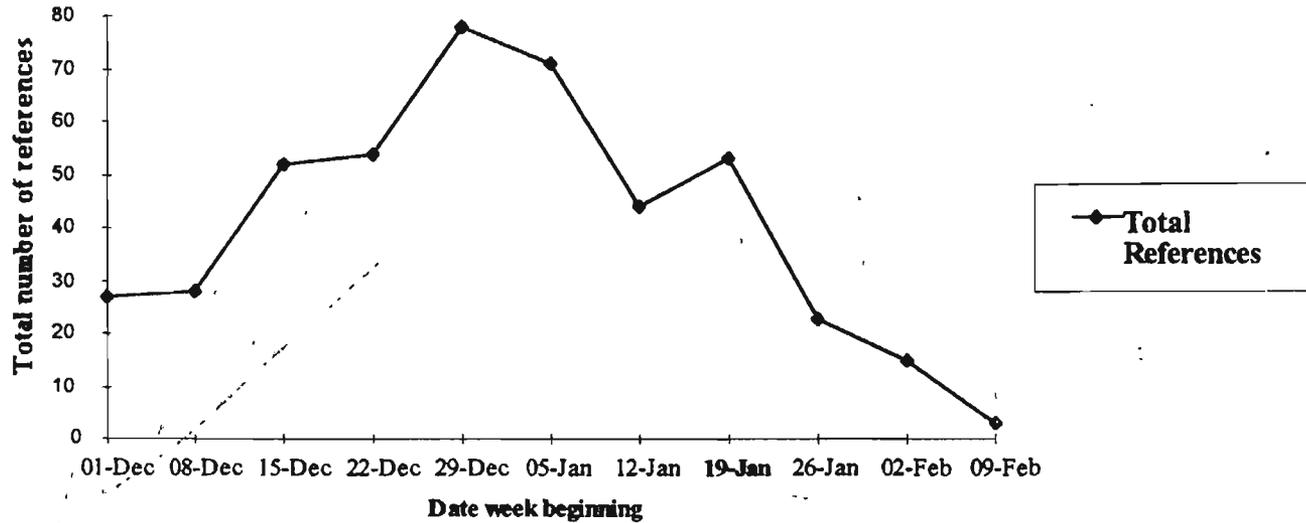
**Table 4. Tone of articles by article type (percentages of references).**

ARTICLE TONE	NEWS	EDITORIAL	LETTERS	FEATURES		ADVERTS	OTHER
				Journalist column	News analysis		
POS.	29	60	36.4	16.7	13.6	88.9	30.4
NEG.	31.8	20	47	66.7	59.1	11.1	30.4
NEUT	39.3	20	16.6	16.7	27.3	0	39.1

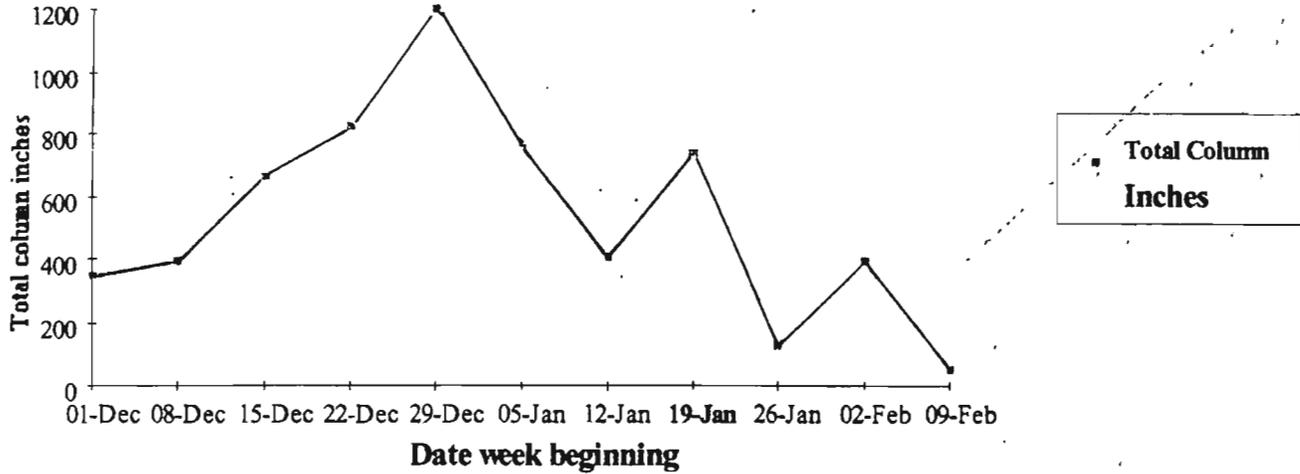
**Total number of references: 448**

### Appendix 3.

**Figure 1: Total Weekly References**

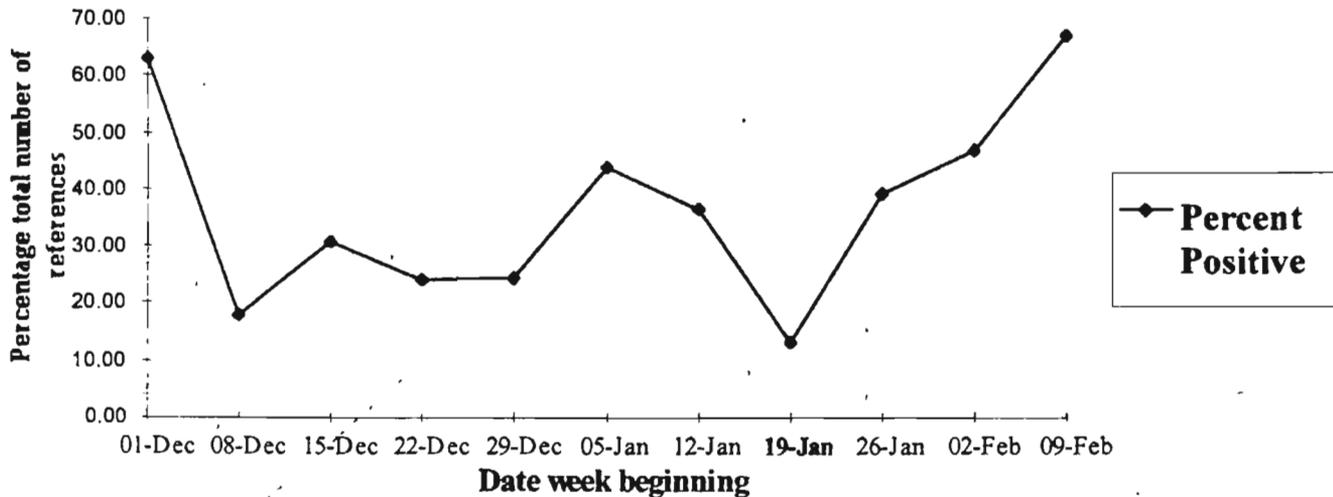


**Figure 2: Total weekly Column Inches**

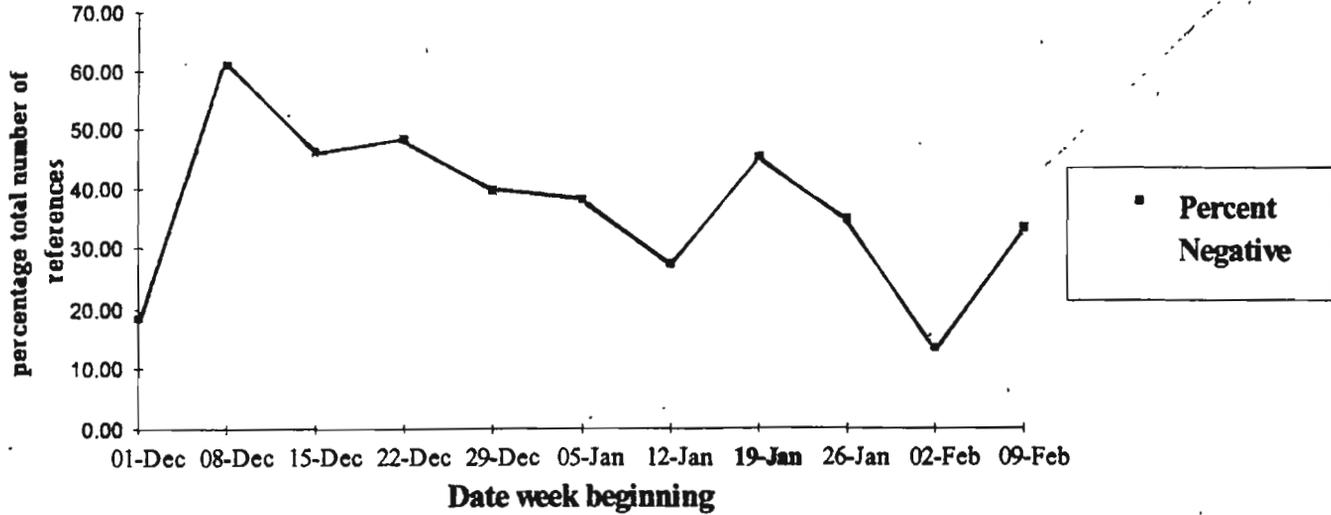


**19-Jan:** Week in which vintners marched & intention to amend legislation was reported.

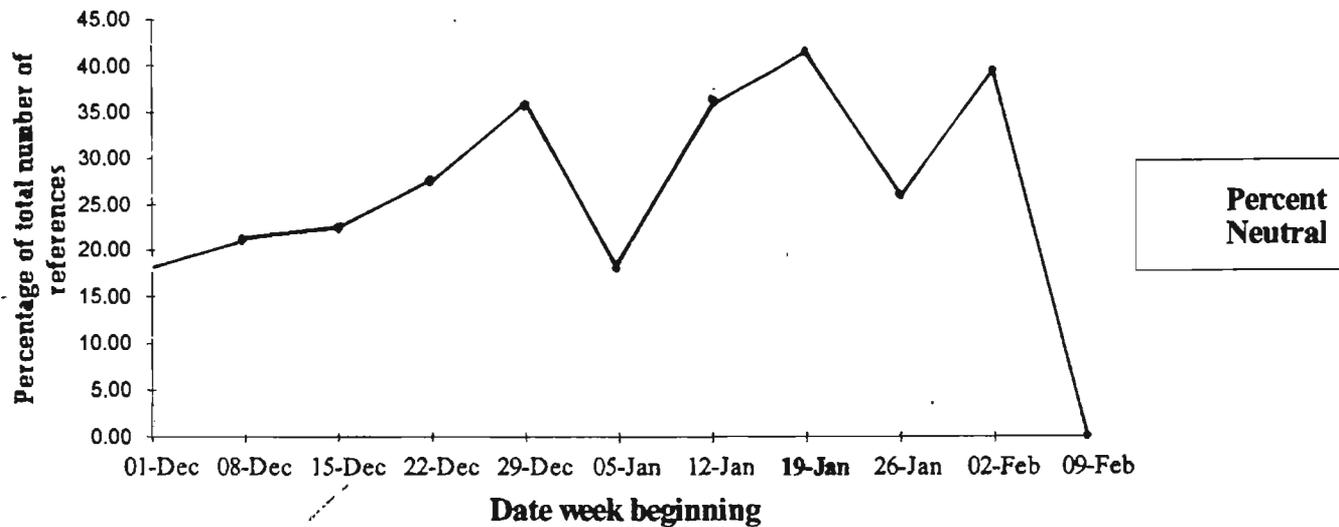
**Figure 3: Percent Weekly Positive Articles.**



**Figure 4: Percent Weekly Negative Articles**



**Figure 5: Percent Weekly Neutral Articles**



19-Jan: Week in which vintners marched & intention to amend legislation was reported.



A



## About the Authors

### **Conor Mc Lernon B.Sc.**

Graduated from Queens University, Now working as a researcher on health and environmental issues for the Dublin Healty Cities Project.

### **Ray Bateson B.A., Dip. Soc. Sci.**

Co-ordinator, Dublin Healthy Cities Project.

### **Dr. Mary Hynes M.B., M.P.H., M.S.P.H.M.I.**

Specialist in public medicine, Eastern Health Board.

**THIS BOOKLET  
IS SPONSORED  
BY**



**Foras Aiseanna Saothair, the Training  
and Employment Authority is a state  
agency which provides a range of training  
and employment services to job seekers,  
commuinity groups and employers.**