



SUBJECT Important changes to alcohol driving limits

DATE 28 November 2014

TO All personnel

FROM Hamish More, Director, People and Capability

STATUS Safety alert/notice

Action Note and act on

Summary New lower breath and blood alcohol limits for drivers come into effect from Monday 1 December.

New legal driving limits As all of you should be aware, from this coming Monday 1 December 2014, new significantly lower breath and blood alcohol limits for all drivers 20 years and over come into effect.

The new legal limits are:

- **250 micrograms** of alcohol per litre of **breath** – reduced from the current limit of 400 micrograms
- **50 milligrams** of alcohol per 100 millilitres of **blood** – reduced from the current limit of 80 milligrams
- for drivers under 20 years of age, the limit stays at zero.

What this means

Each of us within the New Zealand Fire Service has a responsibility to ensure we do not put ourselves, our colleagues, members of the public or the NZFS reputation at risk, through our behaviours or the choices that each of us individually make.

This means that:

- while NZFS employees are at work or on duty there is zero tolerance to alcohol
- NZFS volunteers must always keep within the new reduced driving limits for breath and blood alcohol when undertaking NZFS work and when driving anywhere
- wherever possible, we encourage NZFS volunteers to adopt a zero tolerance approach to alcohol by discussing options, planning ahead and designating those who will respond to incidents.

With guidance from the Strategic Leadership Team, the NZFS is developing an approach and policy for alcohol and drugs, and we are doing this in discussion with representatives from the New Zealand Professional Firefighters Union, the United Fire Brigades Association, the Public Service Association and the Executive Fire Officers Society. At the end of the day this is about safety – **everyone home safely every time.**

There will be more information and guidance forthcoming for all NZFS personnel when the policy is finalised and ready to be implemented in 2015.

Things to note

In the meantime, when considering your responsibility to keep within the new legal driving limits, please be aware of the following.

- Blood alcohol levels continue to rise for up to two hours after drinking stops.
- Even small amounts of alcohol affect your judgement and the ability to drive safely begins to deteriorate after just one drink.
- When you have been drinking, you are not the best judge of your own level of impairment.
- Using the number of drinks consumed as a guideline to the reduced limit is unreliable as there are many variables that impact on blood and breath levels, including:
 - strength and type of alcohol
 - size of drinks
 - gender
 - individual body weight and mass
 - health conditions or medications that can affect the rate of absorption
 - food consumed.
- Remember that there is **no 'safe' level of alcohol for driving**, and the best advice is to avoid any doubt by choosing not to drive if you are going to drink. Although limits will vary for each person, the Science Media Centre has developed an [infographic](#) based on guidance from the Institute of Environmental Science and Research (ESR), which provides some level of information for people to consider.
- Please let us continue our strong and proud history in the New Zealand Fire Service of looking out for each other and trying to keep each other safe in everything we do.

End of notice