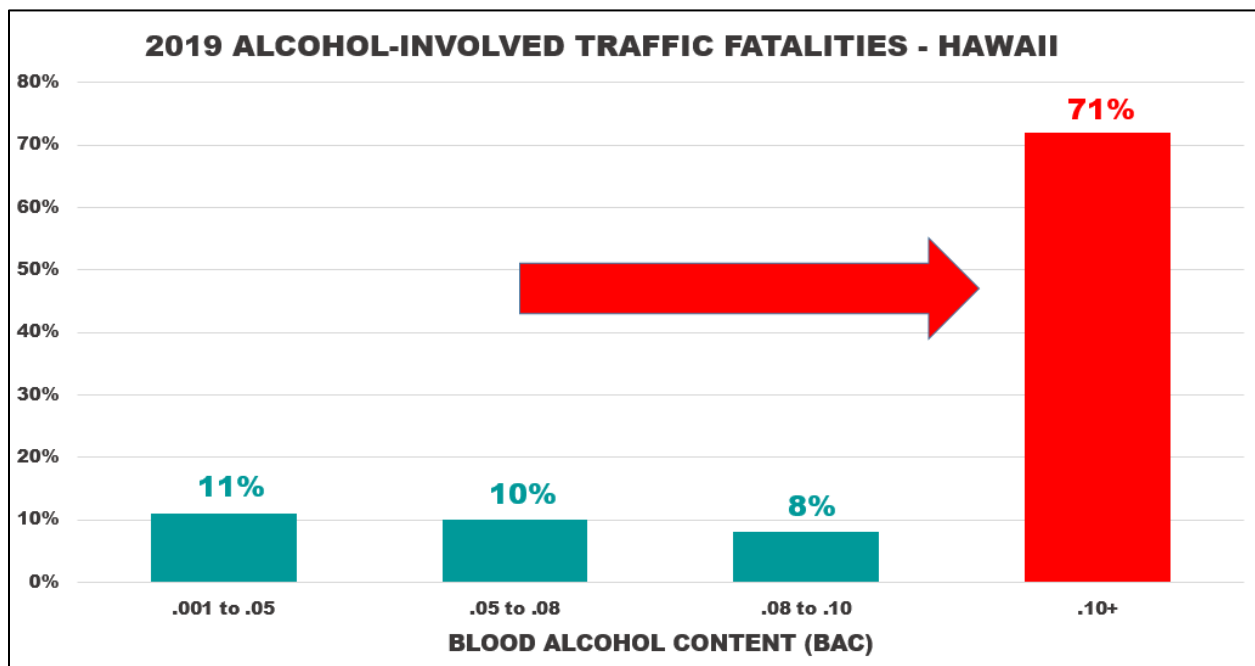


Primer: Traffic Fatalities in Hawaii

Hawaii lawmakers should follow the science when considering legislation that would lower the blood alcohol concentration (BAC) arrest level for driving from 0.08 to 0.05. The 40 percent reduction would subject those who consume a drink or two to a term of imprisonment. Predictably, at this low BAC level, impairment is not meaningful. Studies have shown talking on a hands-free cellphone—what is broadly considered responsible behavior—is more impairing than having a 0.05 BAC.

Traffic fatality data in Hawaii reflects these findings. Drivers with high-BAC levels are responsible for the vast majority of alcohol-involved traffic deaths—even when including incidents where only small traces have been detected and it’s unlikely alcohol was the primary factor. **The average BAC of a drunk driver involved in a fatal crash in the state is 0.18—nearly four times the proposed new level.**



Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Lowering the BAC limit to 0.05 will do little to improve road safety. High-BAC offenders who are already breaking the law are unlikely to change their behavior because the legal definition of “drunk” is watered down. The change would mainly impact responsible consumers.

Supporters of the 0.05 policy may point to Utah—which has been the lone state to adopt a lower legal limit—as a success story. But observers should be careful crediting the .05 law for recent traffic safety figures. Although drunk driving deaths did drop in Utah, South Dakota and Vermont experienced an even bigger decline. Fatalities in 28 other states also fell.

If Hawaii lawmakers want to truly improve road safety, new legislation needs to focus on the most pressing danger—high-BAC drunk drivers—not someone who has a drink with dinner.