



# Alcohol Open Container

Possible Lives Saved Nationally

**161**

Economic Impact

**\$2,205,700,000**

## Background

Open container laws prohibit the possession or consumption of open alcoholic beverages in the passenger compartment of a motor vehicle. These regulations are a key component of impaired driving prevention, designed to eliminate in-vehicle consumption and reduce the opportunities for both drivers and passengers to contribute to traffic safety risks. The central policy goals of these laws are:

- **Deterrence:** Reduce the likelihood of drivers consuming alcohol while operating a vehicle.
- **Enforcement:** Provide law enforcement with a clear basis for roadside intervention, observation, and investigation of potential driving under the influence (DUI) offenses.



## Data and Research

- Implementing and publicizing zero-tolerance open container laws is necessary to elevate this perceived risk and deter motorists from consuming alcohol while driving. Active enforcement of open container laws is important for these laws to be effective. In one study, self-reported impaired driving was nearly 18% lower in states that actively enforced open container laws compared with states that did not (Lenk et al., 2016).<sup>14</sup>
- Another survey of state and local law enforcement agencies finds less than half report enforcing their open container laws, suggesting open container enforcement is under-utilized in some areas.<sup>15</sup>
- A longitudinal study tracking alcohol-related fatalities from 1986 to 2005 found a 7% reduction in the alcohol-impaired fatality rate in states where open-container alcohol laws were in place.<sup>16</sup>
- **Public Opinion:** Survey data in both law and no-law states show strong public support for open container laws.<sup>17</sup>
- **Estimated Lives Saved:** If all U.S. states enacted open container laws that met federal recommendations, 161 lives could be saved annually.
- **Economic Impact:** This estimates how much money society saves when policies prevent deaths and injuries in car crashes. If all states states enacted open container laws that met federal recommendations, over two billion dollars would be saved.

## Policy Recommendation

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States should enact an open container law that prohibits the possession or consumption of open containers of alcohol within the passenger area.

This policy recommendation is supported by AAA, MADD, and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

## Relevant Research

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For more resources and tools visit [newsroom.aaa.com/impaireddriving](https://newsroom.aaa.com/impaireddriving).

