

# Safety Council urges 21-year-old drinking

The Associated Press

Washington — Federal safety officials urged 35 states — including Alaska — Friday to raise their drinking age to 21, saying that a third of the people killed in alcohol-related auto accidents are between the ages of 16 and 24.

"This is a national tragedy and a national scandal," declared James Burnett, chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board, which called for uniform minimum drinking ages of 21 nationwide.

According to information gathered by Dr. C. Earl Albrecht, former Commissioner of Health, in 1979 70 percent of the 80 traffic deaths in the state were alcohol-related.

Albrecht's statistics show that 10 of the 19 deaths in the 15 to 18 age group in 1979 were alcohol-related for a 52.63 percent of those deaths.

Of the 19 to 25 age group, 10 of 28 traffic deaths were alcohol-related for a 35.7 percent alcohol rate; and in the 26 to 30 age group, 11 of 23 deaths or 47.8 percent were alcohol-related.

In 1979, 46 deaths of the 108 traffic accidents were alcohol-related.

In the years 1976 to 1979, the following percentage of accident deaths involved alcohol for all age groups: 1976, 6 of every 10 accidents involved booze; in 1977, almost 5 of every 10 were booze-related; in 1978 48.2 percent were booze-related and in 7 of every 10 involved liquor.

Total accidents showed the following figures:

Of all accidents, fatal and non-fatal, in 1979, 220 accidents were recorded for the 15 to 18 age group for 11.3 percent of accidents attributed to that age group, but, according

to Albrecht's figures, only 3.4 percent of the licensed drivers were 15 to 18 years old.

In the 19 to 22 age group, a total of 992 accidents were recorded for a whopping 47.2 percent of all accidents occurring to people in that age group. Only 36.5 percent of licensed drivers were in that age group.

For the 30 to 39 age group, 407 accidents were recorded for a 20.2 percent of accidents attributed to that age group while 27.8 percent of all drivers were in that age group so drivers older than 30 were much less inclined to be involved in booze-related accidents than younger drivers.

The statistics for drivers older than 40 also show that those age groups are involved in a proportionally lesser accident rate than they are represented in the driving category.

The safety board, in letters to governors and state legislatures, said surveys of accident reports show a direct relationship between the drinking age and the number of young people that are killed in traffic accidents involving alcohol.

The safety panel said its recommendation was prompted by a number of recent alcohol-related auto crashes in which there were a large number of young people killed, including one crash on Long Island that claimed nine lives.

There has been a move recently toward higher drinking ages, reversing a trend in the early 1970s when 24 states lowered theirs to 18 and another six to 19. Fifteen states today have 21-year minimum age requirements for the purchase of alcoholic beverages.

"The board realizes this recommendation will not be popular," Burnett acknowledged.