

# Throw every legal penalty in sight at DUI drivers

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Unfortunately, it is very easy to make the case for cracking down harder on drunken and drugged driving, as Gov. Jay Inslee has just proposed.

Where to begin? Last time we visited this subject, three weeks ago, we cited the appalling case of a multiple offender accused of plowing into a family – killing two of them – in Seattle.

We could have mentioned the Gig Harbor man charged with vehicular homicide last month after – according to police – he crashed his car at high speed near Purdy and killed a 9-year-old nephew. Police said he had twice the legal limit of blood alcohol and four ounces of marijuana in the car.

And since then — earlier this month — there was the guy accused of doing a U-turn into the wrong lane on state Route 520 and slamming head-on at highway speed into another car near the University of Washington, killing the driver.

DUI fatalities happen so often that only the most spectacular cases get headlines. Less dramatic ones might as well be background noise. According to Mothers Against Drunk Driving, crashes involving alcohol or drugs — or both — have killed more than 900 people in this state over the last five years. The number of people severely injured is far higher.

This despite 30 years of aggressive efforts by MADD and other advocates to put tougher laws on the book.

Inslee and a bipartisan group of lawmakers want to make Washington's DUI laws tougher yet. The Legislature has already tried many tactics — such as license revocation upon arrest, interlock devices and mandated substance-abuse treatment, yet the fatality rate remains intolerably high.

The Inslee legislation would step up jail sentences for offenders, forbid them from buying alcohol for 10 years, deny them deferred sentences and require that their driver's licenses, once restored, be vertical in shape. They'd have to equip their cars with interlock devices before getting them out of impoundment.

Enact it all. The combination of drinking and driving ought to be fought like the smallpox virus.

Throw in another measure, too. One of the most effective deterrents to impaired driving is the sobriety checkpoint, in which police stop and check all drivers for intoxication at specific times and places.

The U.S. Supreme Court has upheld the constitutionality of sobriety checkpoints, which are common in many states. But the Washington Supreme Court — citing the tighter search-and-seizure safeguards of the state constitution — forbade them in 1988. Yet the state high court never ruled on checkpoints approved by the Legislature, requested by police chiefs and authorized by judges.

Such a measure is worth a try. And if the high court still doesn't like checkpoints, they're worth an amendment to the Washington Constitution.