

Study: Even one drink can be dangerous

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A University of Washington study warns that even a single strong drink can make a person "blind drunk" and impair the drinker's driving abilities.

The study, appearing in Friday's issue of the Journal of Applied Cognitive Psychology, found that those who were mildly intoxicated -- which is half the legal intoxication limit -- were heavily compromised in their ability to notice an unexpected visual object while being focused on another simple task.

It has been known that the so-called "inattention blindness" phenomenon causes salient objects appearing in the visual field to go undetected. But the current study seeks to show these visual errors become even more likely under the influence of alcohol.

The research did not directly test driving aptitude but noted implications for driving could be serious.

"We rely on our ability to perceive a multitude of information when we drive (speed limit, road signs, other cars)," said Seema Clifasefi, the study's lead author. "If even a mild dose of alcohol compromises our ability to take in some of this information ... then it seems likely that our driving ability may also be compromised."

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