Press Release

Findings from the DEKRA Road Safety Report 2026

Work stress, alcohol and drugs: A dangerous mix behind the wheel

- Alcohol and drug use pose a serious road-safety risk
- 60% of professional drivers regularly feel tired while driving
- Calls for better working conditions

Professional drivers spend their working lives on the road and can face highly stressful conditions. In such moments, it can be tempting to turn to psychoactive substances such as alcohol, amphetamines, cannabis, or cocaine – for instance, to relax, escape stress, or boost one's performance. "However, using substances as a strategy to cope with highly demanding work is both ineffective and dangerous", warns DEKRA traffic psychologist Dr. Thomas Wagner. The combined use of alcohol and cannabis is particularly problematic, as it can further exacerbate the negative effects on driving behavior. Among other things, perception, reaction time, and decision-making ability can be impaired.

Those who drive trucks or buses daily and must also work at night have to contend not only with the specific demands of the job but also with undesirable consequences such as fatigue. In a survey commissioned by the Brussels-based European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF), 60% of truck and bus drivers reported regularly feeling tired while behind the wheel. The 2021 study also assumes a high number of unreported cases, as many of those affected fear possible consequences. 24% of the bus drivers surveyed, and 30% of the truck drivers stated that they had fallen asleep at the wheel at least once in the past twelve months. 57% of bus drivers and 51% of truck drivers wanted to pull over due to fatigue during the same period but were unable to do so.

According to various studies, sleep deprivation can increase the risk of accidents eightfold. Many drivers try to combat fatigue with stimulants such as caffeine. However, it is not uncommon for them to turn to alcohol or other drugs to stay alert. Just how widespread this use may be is illustrated by a review study from the Universidade Estadual de Londrina in Brazil on the use of psychoactive substances among truck drivers, cited in the DEKRA Road Safety Report 2026, "Working in Road

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Contact Wolfgang Sigloch
Phone +49.711.7861-2386
Fax +49.711.7861-742386
E-Mail wolfgang.sigloch@dekra.com

DEKRA e.V.
Corporate Communications
Handwerkstraße 15
70565 Stuttgart, Germany
www.dekra.com/en/press-overview

Traffic". In the self-reports, alcohol was most frequently cited as a coping mechanism, followed by amphetamines, cannabis, and cocaine.

Drug use as a performance-enhancing strategy

The authors, led by Prof. Edmarlon Girotto, identified, among other factors, younger age, longer trips, night shifts, long-distance routes, short rest periods, limited work experience, productivity-based income, and a history of being involved in accidents as influencing factors. Personal characteristics such as young age and smoking were primarily associated with alcohol use. Poor working conditions such as night shifts and long drives were particularly linked to amphetamine use. Other studies have reached similar conclusions and indicate that professional drivers also use drugs to enhance performance. Chronic and high-dose consumption of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) can impair the ability to drive safely – in part due to prolonged periods of intoxication and elimination times.

"Often, users don't even know how much THC they're actually ingesting from a cannabis joint", says DEKRA expert Thomas Wagner, pointing out another problem. This increases the risk that drivers may no longer be fit to drive safely, as cannabis – like all psychoactive substances – affects the nervous system and thus fundamental aspects of the ability to drive safely. Driving difficulties observed after cannabis use primarily involve staying in lane, regulating driving speed, and adhering to right-of-way rules at traffic lights or intersections.

Excessive alcohol consumption is also more common among truck drivers than in the general population. In an Italian pilot study involving 335 truck drivers, 24% of respondents reported drinking alcohol during work hours or breaks. More than 21% exceeded the threshold for unhealthy alcohol consumption. Interviews with 343 truck drivers from the Netherlands revealed that more than 56% of respondents who consume alcohol have occasionally driven while hungover. As a result, they assessed their driving style as significantly less relaxed, less safe, and less responsible.

A look at the legal regulations in various countries highlights the differences. In Germany, individuals are generally permitted to drive a motor vehicle if they have up to 3.4 nanograms per milliliter (ng/ml) of THC and, at the same time, up to 0.49 per mille of alcohol in their blood. In France, when it comes to cannabis while driving, proof of consumption is generally considered a violation of the law; a specific THC threshold is not required. If alcohol levels simultaneously exceed the legal limit of 0.5 per mille, the penalties are increased. In Canada, a THC level exceeding 2.5 ng/ml combined with an alcohol level exceeding 0.5 per mille is considered a criminal offense. In Australia, even any detectable amount of THC while driving is prohibited, and higher penalties are imposed for combined drink-and-drug offenses.

Improving working conditions to improve road safety

“Overall, it is clear that the use of psychoactive substances can be linked to poor working conditions, among other factors, such as fatigue”, says Thomas Wagner. He is not alone in believing that these conditions must be improved urgently. “If Europe is serious about improving road safety, it must address the conditions under which professional drivers work”, Livia Spera, Secretary General of the ETF, also demands in her statement in the DEKRA Road Safety Report 2026. In her view, key areas of focus include realistic route planning as well as compliance with social regulations and their effective enforcement.

Further background on this topic, as well as on many other aspects related to “Working in Road Traffic”, can be found in the DEKRA Road Safety Report 2026. It is available online at www.dekra-roadsafety.com.

About DEKRA

For more than 100 years, DEKRA has been a trusted name in safety. Founded in 1925 with the original goal of improving road safety through vehicle inspections, DEKRA has grown to become the world's largest independent, non-listed expert organization in the field of testing, inspection, and certification. Today, as a global partner, the company supports its customers with comprehensive services and solutions to drive safety and sustainability forward. In 2025, DEKRA generated revenue of 4.4 billion euros. More than 48,000 employees are providing qualified and independent expert services in approximately 60 countries across five continents. DEKRA holds a Platinum sustainability rating from EcoVadis, placing it among the top 1% of the globally assessed companies.