



Toxicology Section – 2004

K11 Improving Data Collection Procedures for the Fatal Analysis Reporting System (FARS)

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Participants will learn about 1) the data contained in the FARS (Fatal Analysis Reporting System) database and how to access the data online, 2) how the data is collected and analyzed, and 3) what measures can be implemented to improve the data collection process.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has collected extensive data associated with fatal traffic accidents in the FARS database since 1975. Over 100 data elements are coded from sources including the police accident reports, death certificates, EMS reports, and coroner/medical examiner reports. Data is collected from the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico by FARS analysts who code and transmit the data, in a standard format, to the National Center for Statistics and Analysis. The FARS database can be accessed at www-fars.nhtsa.org.

Toxicological data in the database consists of quantitative alcohol results and qualitative results for drugs other than alcohol. Based on the data submitted, estimates are made of the number of alcohol involved fatal traffic accidents for the nation, and on a state-by-state basis. Data submission rates vary significantly from state to state. In 2001, 16,653 fatally injured drivers nationwide had blood alcohol concentration (BAC) results reported to FARS out of a total of 25,840, or 64%. However, only 33 percent of the fatally injured drivers in Texas had BAC results reported compared to 81 percent reported in California.

An informal poll of medical examiner toxicologists indicates the problem is not a lack of testing for alcohol in deceased drivers. Most medical examiner offices test all drivers involved in a fatal traffic accident for alcohol. The poll did indicate most offices are not aware of the FARS database and the need to provide toxicological test results. An electronic data transfer system for submitting data directly from the forensic toxicology laboratory to the Texas Department of Public Safety and the FARS data collection analysts will be presented.

FARS, Traffic, Toxicology