STATE COMMITTEE TOLD

Drinking Drivers Age 21-25 More Of Problem

By MIKE HASTEN
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BATON ROUGE - A state committee looking into the possibility of raising the legal age for purchasing liquor in Louisiana from 18 to 21 heard figures Wednesday that leads some members to think they are looking at the wrong age group.

The committee, which is chaired by New Iberia Sen. Oswald Decuir, learned yesterday that drinking drivers between the age of 21 and 25 are more of a problem.

Sherman Disagrees

Ed Sherman of the Louisiana Highway Safety Commission said that of 151,621 wrecks in 1983, drivers age 18-20 were involved in 28,540. The accidents were not necessarily caused by the younger drivers.

Of those wrecks, 18-20-year-olds were behind the wheel in 129 of the state's 942 wrecks in which the driver or a passenger was killed. There was no breakdown as to whether the younger drivers were at fault.

Statistics Offered

The state had 261 fatalities related to alcohol. Of those, 27 involved 18-20-year-olds who had been drinking enough to score a .005 on a breath analysis test.

In Louisiana, .01 is considered drunk.

Comparing the 1,790 alcohol related wrecks involving younger drivers to the state total of 151,621 wrecks shows that younger drivers who had been drinking were involved in 1.2 percent of the wrecks.

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State Has None

When the committee asked for records on DWI arrests for the age group in question, Carl Jackson, director of research for the Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement, said the state has no such reports.

“Louisiana has no such information on anybody,” he said.

Baer then asked if the lack of records was hurting the state’s ability to prosecute multiple offenders.

Jackson said that unless a sheriff or police chief files a report with the state or a drunk driver is arrested several times in the same area, law enforcement officials aren’t aware of any previous arrests.

Baer said if the state really wants to get drunk drivers off the roads, it should spend the $400,000 needed to put a reporting system back into effect so it can enforce laws already on the books.

Decuir said the group will meet again in February and probably will meet in other cities to get local information.

Since the proposed law involves young adults, some meetings might be held on college campuses, he said.