MADD gigs state for failure to lower blood-alcohol standard

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Officials of Mothers Against Drunk Driving say Louisiana's lower than average grade on MADD's national report card is partly the result of the state's refusal to reduce the amount of alcohol consumption that's considered safe for driving.

"The C-minus comes as no surprise," said Warren Melancon, executive director of the Louisiana MADD office.

For instance, "Testing for blood concentration level continues to be .10 when it should be lowered to .08," he said.

Nine other states have lowered their drunken driving standards to .08 percent blood-alcohol level and have seen a reduction in the number of alcohol-related car accidents, said Melancon.

Another factor that puts Louisiana behind is the "legal loophole in its 18-to-21-year-old drinking laws," he said.

State laws require that a person be 21 years or older to drink, but numerous exceptions allow 18-to-20-year-olds to legally consume alcoholic beverages in many cases.

MADD's 1993 "Rating the States" survey by safety leaders gave the nation as a whole an average of a B-minus. Only Mississippi, with a D, ranked lower than Louisiana.

Eleven categories were rated, including the governor's leadership, statistics and records and youth issues.

Louisiana received a D for enforcement. But Melancon said that it's not necessarily the fault of law enforcement agencies.

The survey stressed that Louisiana does not allow sobriety checkpoints and law enforcement lacks sufficient funds to jail criminal offenders and adequately pays its officers.

Under the category of regulatory control and availability, the state scored another D. Melancon said the grade is low because the Alcohol and Beverage Board needs to strengthen some of its regulation of the alcohol industry.