

## **DRIVING WHILE ABILITY IMPAIRED BY DRUGS**

### **Vehicle and Traffic Law 1192(4)**

#### **(Committed on or after Nov. 1, 1988)**

(Updated Jan. 2008, Dec. 2021, Jan & March 2025, & March 2026)<sup>1</sup>

The (specify) count is Driving While Ability Impaired by Drugs.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The January 2008 update was for the purpose of providing a clearer definition of Aoperates@ by removing the language Afor the purpose of placing it in operation@ and replacing such language with Afor the purpose of placing the vehicle in motion.@ See *People v Alamo*, 34 NY2d 453, 458 (1974); *People v Marriott*, 37 AD2d 868 (3d Dept. 1971); *People v. O'Connor*, 159 Misc.2d 1072, 1074-1075 (Dist. Ct., Suffolk, 1994). See also *People v. Prescott*, 95 NY2d 655, 662 (2001).

The December 2021, January 2025, March 2025 and 2026 updates were for the purpose of revising the definition of when a person's ability to operate a motor vehicle is impaired by the use of a drug. See cases in footnote (5).

<sup>2</sup> This crime is classified a misdemeanor unless:

[1] If the defendant has within the previous ten years been convicted of a violation of Vehicle and Traffic Law ' 1192(2), (3), or (4), or of Penal Law " 120.03, 120.04, 125.12, or 125.13, a conviction of driving while ability impaired by drugs is a class E felony. Vehicle and Traffic Law ' 1193(1)(c)(i).

[2] If the defendant has within the previous ten years twice been convicted of any of those crimes, a conviction of driving while ability impaired by drugs is a class D felony. Vehicle and Traffic Law ' 1193(1)(c)(ii). For the gradation of the offense for Aspecial vehicles@ see Vehicle and Traffic Law ' 1193(1)(d).

Thus, an additional element of this crime when charged as a Class D or E felony is that the defendant has previously been convicted of one or more particular crimes. That element must be charged in a special information, and after commencement of trial the defendant must be arraigned on that special information. If, upon such arraignment, the defendant admits the element, the court must not make any reference to it in the definition of the offense or in listing the elements of the offense. But if the defendant denies the element or remains mute, the court must add the element to the definition of the offense and the list of elements. CPL ' 200.60. See *People v. Cooper*, 78 N.Y.2d 476 (1991).

Under our law, no person shall operate a motor vehicle while the person's ability to operate such a motor vehicle is impaired by the use of a drug.<sup>3</sup>

The following terms used in that definition have a special meaning:

MOTOR VEHICLE means every vehicle operated or driven upon a public highway [private road open to motor vehicle traffic] [parking lot] which is propelled by any power other than muscular power.<sup>4</sup>

To OPERATE a motor vehicle means to drive it.

*[NOTE: Add the following if there is an issue as to operation:*

A person also OPERATES a motor vehicle when such person is sitting behind the wheel of a motor vehicle for the purpose of placing the vehicle in motion, and when the motor vehicle is moving, or even if it is not moving, the engine is

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<sup>3</sup> In the statute, the word Adrug@ is followed by the words Aas defined in this chapter.@ Since the charge later sets forth the definition of Adrug,@ the words Aas defined in this chapter@ have been omitted.

<sup>4</sup> The term Amotor vehicle@ is defined in Vehicle and Traffic Law ' 125. That definition contains exceptions which are not set forth in the text of the charge. The term Apublic highway@ appearing in the definition of Amotor vehicle@ is itself separately defined in Vehicle and Traffic Law ' 134. Further, while the definition of Amotor vehicle@ is restricted to a vehicle operated or driven on a Apublic highway,@ the provisions of Vehicle and Traffic Law ' 1192 expressly apply to Apublic highways, private roads open to motor vehicle traffic and any other parking lot.@ Vehicle and Traffic Law ' 1192(7). (The term Aparking lot@ is also specially defined by Vehicle and Traffic Law ' 1192[7]. See also *People v. Williams*, 66 N.Y.2d 659 [1985].) The definition of Amotor vehicle@ has been modified to accord with its meaning as applied to Vehicle and Traffic Law ' 1192.

running.<sup>5]</sup>

The word DRUG includes (specify).<sup>6</sup>

A person's ability to operate a motor vehicle is IMPAIRED by the use of a drug when that person's use of a drug has actually impaired, to any extent, the physical and mental abilities which such person is expected to possess in order to operate a vehicle as a reasonable and prudent driver.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See *People v Alamo*, 34 NY2d 453, 458-459 (1974) where the Court addressed the definition of operate as follows:

"An established line of authority in New York and elsewhere holds that for purposes of offenses for driving while intoxicated under the Vehicle and Traffic Law, operation of the vehicle is established on proof that the defendant was merely behind the wheel with the engine running without need for proof that defendant was observed driving the car, i.e., operating it so as to put it in motion. (*People v. Marriott*, 37 A D 2d 868; *Matter of Tomasello v. Tofany*, 32 A D 2d 962. . . ; *Matter of Prudhomme v. Hults*, 27 A D 2d 234 . . . ; *People v. Ceschini*, 63 Misc 2d 15 ...). Quoted with approval in *Prudhomme* was the language from *People v. Domagala* (123 Misc. 757, 758) that an individual 'began to violate the law [against operating while intoxicated] the instant he began to manipulate the machinery of the motor for the purpose of putting the automobile into motion', even though he did not succeed in moving it. (27 A D 2d, at p. 236.) Also quoted approvingly was this language from *Commonwealth v. Uski* (263 Mass. 22, 24): 'A person operates a motor vehicle within the meaning of [the statute] when, in the vehicle, he intentionally does any act or makes use of any mechanical or electrical agency which alone or in sequence will set in motion the motive power of that vehicle.' (27 A D 2d, at p. 237.)"

*Alamo* cited with approval *People v Marriott*, 37 AD2d 868 [3d Dept 1971], where the Court held that: "'Operates' is a broader concept [than driving]. (*Matter of Prudhomme v. Hults*, 27 A D 2d 234, 236.) The trial court correctly charged the jury that a person operates a motor vehicle when he begins to use the mechanism of the automobile for the purpose of putting the automobile in motion even though he does not move it". See also *People v Prescott*, 95 NY2d 655, 662 [2001] ["Our courts have long recognized that the definition of operation is broader than that of driving and that " '[a] person operates a motor vehicle within the meaning of [the statute] when, in the vehicle, he intentionally does any act or makes use of any mechanical or electrical agency which alone or in sequence will set in motion the motive power of the vehicle' " (*People v Alamo*, 34 NY2d 453, 459, quoting *Matter of Prudhomme v Hults*, 27 AD2d 234, 237; see also, *People v O'Connor*, 159 Misc 2d 1072, 1074-1075)."

<sup>6</sup> See Vehicle and Traffic Law ' 114-a and Public Health Law ' 3306(1).

<sup>7</sup> See *People v Dondorfer*, \_NY3d\_, 2026 NY Slip Op 00823 (2026), *abrogating People v Caden N.*, 189 AD3d 84 (3d Dept 2020),

The law does not require any particular chemical or physical test to prove that a person's ability to operate a motor vehicle was impaired by the use of a drug. To determine whether the defendant's ability to operate a motor vehicle was impaired, you may consider all the surrounding facts and circumstances, including, for example:

the defendant's physical condition and appearance, balance and coordination, and manner of speech;

the presence or absence of an odor of a drug;

the manner in which the defendant operated the motor vehicle;

[opinion testimony regarding the defendant's being under the influence of a drug];

[the circumstances of any accident];

[the results of any test for the presence of drugs in the defendant's blood].

*[NOTE: If there is evidence of drugs in the defendant's blood, add, as appropriate, the following paragraphs:*

In considering the results of any test given to determine the content of the defendant's blood you must consider:

the qualifications and reliability of the person who gave the test;

the lapse of time between the operation of the motor vehicle and the giving of the test;

whether the device used was in good working order at the time the test was administered; and

whether the test was properly given.<sup>8</sup>

(Evidence that the test was administered by a person possessing a valid New York State Department of Health permit to administer

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<sup>8</sup> *People v. Freeland*, 68 N.Y.2d 699 (1986).

such test allows, but does not require, the inference that the test was properly given.)<sup>9</sup>]

[NOTE: If there was an improper refusal to submit to a test, add:

Under our law, if a person has been given a clear and unequivocal warning of the consequences of refusing to submit to a chemical test and persists in refusing to submit to such test, and there is no innocent explanation for such refusal, then the jury may, but is not required to, infer that the defendant refused to submit to a chemical test because he or she feared that the test would disclose evidence of the presence of a drug in violation of law.<sup>10</sup>]

In order for you to find the defendant guilty of this crime, the People are required to prove, from all of the evidence in the case beyond a reasonable doubt, both of the following two elements:

1. That on or about (date), in the County of (county), the defendant, (defendant=s name), operated a motor vehicle; and
2. That the defendant did so while his/her ability to operate the motor vehicle was impaired by the use of a drug.

If you find the People have proven beyond a reasonable doubt both of those elements, you must find the defendant guilty of this crime.

If you find the People have not proven beyond a reasonable doubt either one or both of those elements, you must find the defendant not guilty of this crime.

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<sup>9</sup> See *People v. Freeland*, 68 N.Y.2d 699, 701 (1986); *People v. Mertz*, 68 N.Y.2d 136, 148 (1986).

<sup>10</sup> See Vehicle and Traffic Law ' 1194(f); *People v. Thomas*, 46 N.Y.2d 100 (1978), appeal dismissed for want of a substantial federal question, 444 U.S. 891 (1979).