

Alcohol Ignition Interlock Fact Sheet

Alcohol ignition interlocks

An alcohol ignition interlock is a breath test device linked to a vehicle's ignition system. When a driver wishes to start his or her vehicle, he or she must first blow into the device. The vehicle will not start unless the driver's alcohol concentration is below a pre-set blood alcohol concentration (BAC). A data recorder logs the driver's BAC for each attempt to start the vehicle. Interlocks may be calibrated to have "rolling retests," which requires a driver to provide breath tests at regular intervals, preventing drivers from asking a sober friend to start the car, drink while driving, or leaving the car idling in a bar parking lot.¹

Use and prevalence of interlocks

Interlocks are used as a condition of probation for drunk driving offenders after their driver's licenses have been reinstated; they can also be directly mandated by judges. Sometimes interlocks can be used when licenses are revoked upon arrest for drunk driving as well, before conviction. As of 2006, 45 states and the District of Columbia allow for interlocks for some drunk driving offenders.²

- In 20 of these states, the law mandates the use of ignition interlock devices for DWI offenders. These states include: Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah, Virginia and Washington.³
- Twenty-five states have laws that provide for the discretionary use of ignition interlock devices for DWI offenders. These states are: Alaska, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming, and the District of Columbia.⁴
- Five states, Alabama, Hawaii, Maine, South Dakota and Vermont, have no ignition interlock provisions.⁵

Despite these various laws throughout the nation, only 100,000 interlocks are in service in the United States.⁶

Effectiveness of interlocks

Interlock devices are up to 90 percent effective while installed in a vehicle.⁷ Once the interlock is removed from the offender's vehicle, however, the recidivism is similar for both offender groups.⁸ The average offender with an interlock installed in their vehicle gives a breath test five to nine times per day, of which 99 percent feature a BAC under .02.⁹ This data shows that interlocks are an effective weapon against drunk driving.

Alcohol ignition interlocks save lives

Each year, one-third of all drunk driving arrests are of drivers who have previously been convicted of drunk driving. Installing interlocks on all repeat offenders has the potential to save the lives of at least 300 individuals per year.¹⁰ Expanding the installation of interlocks into the

cars of first time offenders could save at least 1,600 lives.¹¹ By requiring interlocks for all convicted drunk drivers, we could save at least 1,900 lives per year.

The public supports the implementation of alcohol ignition interlocks

Eighty-five percent of the public supports the mandatory installation of alcohol ignition interlocks in the vehicles of repeat DWI offenders and 65 percent also support the mandatory installation of interlocks for first time offenders.¹²

Best use of interlock programs

New Mexico is the best model of successful judicial ignition interlock program. In 2005, New Mexico passed a law making interlocks mandatory for all drunk driving offenders: one year for first offenders, two years for second, three years for third, and a lifetime for the fourth offense. As of June 2006, 5,265 ignition interlocks had been installed in New Mexico, significantly more per capita than in any other state.¹³ Additionally, interlocks are perceived as a fair sanction by 85 percent of more than 3,000 offenders from that state.¹⁴

Alcohol ignition interlock programs have been adapted in other countries, as well.

- Australia has interlock programs in three of its states, adding up to 2,500 total interlock installations as of June 2006.¹⁵
- Almost all of the Canadian provinces have interlock programs for drunk driving offenders, most of which are voluntary.¹⁶
- The European Union has conducted feasibility studies in Belgium, Germany, Norway and Spain, while voluntary ignition interlock programs for convicted drunk drivers are also being tested in Finland, France, Germany and Great Britain.¹⁷
- Sweden has the most advanced interlock laws, as drunk driving offenders can choose between having their drivers license revoked or keeping it and participating in the interlock program. For two years, offenders must drive only interlock vehicles and cannot drive outside of Sweden. Drivers are dropped from the program if they are not completely sober during the second year. Two years after they left the program, successful participants had significantly fewer drunk driving arrests and crashes than they did before starting the program.¹⁸

Expanding interlock use for all convicted drunk drivers

The *Campaign* supports several approaches to implement greater use of interlocks for all convicted drunk driving offenders. First, new state laws need to be enacted to require interlock use by all drunk driving offenders, including first time offenders. Second, judges are one of the keys to increasing interlock use because they have the power to implement interlock laws and to penalize drivers who fail to comply with interlock program requirements. The *Campaign* aims to provide active education among state driver's license officials, judges and prosecutors on interlocks.¹⁹

¹ MADD, *International Technology Symposium: A Nation without Drunk Driving Summary Report*. November, 2006: pg 4.

² MADD (2006), *State-by-State Alcohol-Related Laws*. www.madd.org/laws/

³ MADD (2006), *Ignition Interlock Brief*.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Marques, Paul. "Technology Today: Controlling DWI Offenders with Alcohol Ignition Interlock Programs" Presentation at the *MADD International Technology Symposium*: June 19-20, 2006.

⁷ Voas, Robert, et al. "The Alberta Interlock Program: The Evaluation of a Province-Wide Program on DUI Recidivism." *Addiction* 94 (12): 1849-1859. 1999.

⁸ Marques, Paul.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Fell, James. "Potential Role of Technology in Reducing Alcohol-Related Traffic Fatalities." Presentation at the *MADD International Technology Symposium*: June 19-20, 2006.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² McInturff, Bill. "A Presentation of key findings from a national survey of 800 drivers conducted June 8-11, 2006." Presentation at the *MADD International Technology Symposium*: June 19-20, 2006.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Roth, Richard. "Interlocks in New Mexico". Presentation at the *MADD International Technology Symposium*: June 19-20, 2006.

¹⁵ MADD, *International Technology Symposium: A Nation Without Drunk Driving Summary Report*, November, 2006: pg 4.

¹⁶ Ibid, pg 4.

¹⁷ Ibid, pp 4-5.

¹⁸ Ibid, pg 5.

¹⁹ Ibid, pg 5.