



MADD
Activism | Victim Services | Education

**CAMPAIGN TO
ELIMINATE
DRUNK DRIVING**

Ignition Interlocks

Questions & Answers

What is an ignition interlock?

- 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 blood alcohol concentration (BAC) is below a pre-set standard. 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.

Do ignition interlocks reduce drunk driving recidivism?

- Yes. A considerable body of research shows that interlocks are associated with substantial and impressive reductions in recidivism, ranging from 50 percent to 90 percent. These results come from numerous peer-reviewed studies. The evaluations involved a diversity of programs, accounting for the variation in results. Findings have consistently shown the overwhelming benefit of interlocks.

How reliable are ignition interlocks?

- Currently, alcohol ignition interlocks are required by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to prevent a car from starting 90 percent of the time. NHTSA is considering strengthening the current standard.

Are ignition interlocks Constitutional?

- Courts throughout the United States have analyzed this issue and no state appellate court has overturned an interlock statute.

What is the cost of the device and what if the offender cannot afford it?

- On average, interlocks cost about \$70-150 to install and about \$60-80 per month to maintain. The daily cost of this sanction is less than \$3.00 per day, which is well below the cost for other sanctions such as incarceration or electronic monitoring. Moreover, the offender can maintain employment in order to pay for the device. In most jurisdictions, there are fines, program fees, insurance premium increases, assessments and other costs that are significantly more than the interlock fees. If it is a problem, in most states, interlock companies provide interlock devices for indigent offenders at reduced costs or an indigent fund is set up by the state to cover the costs for these offenders.

Why is there a monthly fee to maintain the device?

- The monthly fee to maintain the interlock covers the cost of leasing the device, downloading BAC data collected from the device, monitoring to ensure that the device has not been tampered with, and device calibration to ensure continued optimal accuracy.

Are there ways to bypass using the device, like having someone else blow into it?

- Interlocks are required to have anti-circumvention features that prevent such activity. One of these features is the running retest, which requires offenders to blow into the device at random intervals once the vehicle has been allowed to start. Furthermore, blowing into an interlock is a learned skill that requires specific training that would most likely be difficult for an impaired person to administer. There are also tamper-proof seals on interlocks to detect tampering.

Aren't interlocks an inconvenience to family members who share the offender's vehicle?

- No, family members are allowed to drive the vehicle as well; they simply must not drink and drive. Having an interlock installed on an offender's vehicle actually allows the offender and his or her family members to continue to drive legally. Other sanctions like vehicle impoundment or immobilization do not allow for this.

Are there examples of successful interlock programs?

- Yes, there are successful interlock programs in numerous jurisdictions across the country. Statewide, New Mexico has one of the most successful models of a 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. New Mexico's interlock law has led to the highest rates of currently-installed interlocks per capita than any other state in the nation. Recidivism of interlocked offenders has been reduced on average by 65 percent. With the enactment of stronger interlock laws and a renewed focus on combating drunk driving, New Mexico has made significant progress in recent years: alcohol-involved crashes have gone down by 30 percent; alcohol-involved injuries have gone down by 32 percent; and alcohol-involved fatalities have gone down 22 percent.

Couldn't someone just use compressed air to blow into the device?

- No, the devices have temperature and air gauges to make sure this cannot occur.

Why are judges reluctant to utilize interlock sanctions even when they are mandatory?

- Some of the new advancements in interlock technology have not been well-publicized to the judiciary. As a result, some judges do not know how they work or do not understand that they are an effective sanction. This is why judicial education is so important because generally those judges who know the most about interlock technology are the ones who are using them most.

Could an interlock stop a person's car in traffic, making a more dangerous hazard?

- Interlocks are hooked up to a vehicle's starter system, not to the engine itself. The interlock does not have the ability to stop the vehicle once it is running for safety reasons. When a driver fails a running retest, the vehicle's horn will honk and/or the lights will flash to alert law enforcement – the vehicle will not stop.