



Raleigh County, WV checkpoint

TIME TO TURN THE HEAT ON DRUNK DRIVERS – AGAIN

Reducing Drunk Driving Fatalities in America by 25% Using Technology and Enhanced Enforcement Efforts

By Carl McDonald and Janet Dewey-Kollen

Removing drunk drivers from America's roadways can be accomplished through a combination of existing and new technologies, best practice enforcement programs, and public support.

That is the conclusion of a host of experts who gathered in Albuquerque recently to discuss issues related to reducing drunk driving at the Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) International Technology Symposium: A Nation Without Drunk Driving.

Held in New Mexico because of the state's great progress in the enforcement of drunk driving laws, attendees included law enforcement, leading researchers in the field of impaired driving, vehicle manufacturers, government officials, and safety advocates. Innovations discussed included existing technologies such as ignition interlocks and passive alcohol sensing technology to emerging technologies such as including advances in subdural blood alcohol concentration detection.

MADD leaders shared that technology is just one of a five-part plan that also

includes support of law enforcement, safety belt usage, court monitoring, and alternative transportation to reduce fatalities resulting from drunk driving by 25 percent by December 31, 2008—approximately 3,200 people. Longer-range goals for advance technology are even more ambitious says Chuck Hurley, chief executive officer of MADD. "It is possible that through technology, in five years, the car will know if its driver is

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Corporal Mike Hopkins,
Site Supervisor, Raleigh County

drunk and in ten years, with public support, the car will not work if its driver is drunk," says Hurley.

The U.S. made dramatic progress in curbing drunk driving in the 1980s and early 1990s; however, reductions in alcohol-related crashes plateaued over the last 10 years. Recently, alcohol-related crash fatalities increased 1.7 percent from 2004 to 2005 according to estimates by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. MADD aims to close the loopholes in existing drunk driving legislation, criminal justice systems, and aid law enforcement in deterring drunk driving. With DWI arrests at a 20-year low, it is imperative that sobriety checkpoints and saturation patrols be implemented and drunk driving strategies become a priority for the nation.

Ignition Interlocks

One of the primary conclusions of MADD's Technology Symposium is the need for more alcohol ignition interlocks on vehicles of DWI offenders. Interlocks have been shown to reduce recidivism of drunken driving offenses by 65 percent according to research

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Chuck Hurley, MADD

studies. Specifically, interlock devices can reduce recidivism for first time offenders by 70 percent and 55 percent for repeat offenders. Yet, this is an existing technology that is grossly underutilized. Of the 1.4 million annual DWI arrests that result in 1 to 1.2 million convictions, only 100,000 offenders have interlocks installed in their vehicles today in the U.S.

Forty-five states and Washington, D.C. have legislation enabling courts to require the installation of ignition interlocks on vehicles of those convicted of DWI; however, most courts simply fail to use this device. States that do not have this legislation currently are Alaska, Hawaii, Maine, South Dakota and Vermont. Further, only 14 states have legislation that makes installation of an ignition interlock mandatory. “Not only do ignition interlocks provide a measure of safety for the public, they can be valuable tools to help people know when they are too intoxicated to drive and an aid to courts who need to monitor the terms of probation,” says Chuck Hurley of MADD. Hurley also believes that DWI offenders who have children should always be required to use interlocks since two-thirds of children killed in crashes involving alcohol are riding in the vehicle with the drinking driver, according to U.S. Centers for Disease Control.

Law enforcement could help expand the use of interlocks by educating local prosecutors and judges on the benefits of this proven technology. Since this technology is currently available and use could be expanded immediately, increasing the use of ignition interlocks by DWI offenders is a key first step in the march to reduce DWI in America.

Detering DWI

Which enforcement goal is more important – arresting drunk drivers or deterring drunk driving? The answer, proven by research and model programs, is BOTH. Arresting impaired drivers is critical and increasing arrests has been the goal of law enforcement nationwide for many years.

Even after 20 years of arresting drunk drivers they continue to flood the nation’s roadways. This is why many agencies now invest resources in deterring drunk driving through a new enforcement technique – low manpower sobriety checkpoints. Sobriety checkpoints have been proven to deter drunk driving and reduce alcohol-related fatal and injury crashes by about 20 percent as compared to dedicated patrols. However, enforcement agencies sometimes feel that checkpoints conducted in the traditional manner are too personnel intensive and overtime dependent for regular use.

In 2003 and 2004, the highly respected Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) evaluated the impact of small-scale checkpoints in rural communities on impaired driving and perception of enforcement. Four counties in West Virginia were selected for the study.

After a year of publicized weekly checkpoints using as few as three to five officers, the IIHS concluded that small rural communities can safely and effectively conduct low-manpower sobriety checkpoints on a sustainable basis. Further, the primary effect of the checkpoint enforcement was among people with higher BACs. Compared with the control counties that conducted routine DWI enforcement, study counties, Raleigh and Greenbrier, experienced 64 percent fewer drivers at blood alcohol content levels of 0.08 or higher.

Raleigh County continues to conduct saturation and directed patrols, but checkpoints are a much-appreciated technique for deterring drunk driving. “We can still arrest more impaired drivers by saturation and directed patrols, but we now know the tremendous deterrent effect of checkpoints,” says Corporal Mike Hopkins, Site Supervisor for Raleigh County DWI checkpoints. “Well-publicized checkpoints make

people understand that we’re going to be somewhere in the community looking for drunk drivers,” he adds.

Corporal Hopkins says that at one time, deputies were not always enthusiastic about signing up for overtime sobriety checkpoint patrols, “But now they stand in line to be included in these assignments.” He believes there are three reasons for this turn around: “We stay on top on the paperwork, we commend the guys for their efforts and we do good enforcement while we are on these patrols,” says Corporal Hopkins. He cites a recent checkpoint when they issued 49 citations within a six-hour period: including suspended and revoked license citations, seat belt and child safety seat violations and defective equipment citations. “That’s pretty good work for six deputies within a six hour period, and we reinforced the fact that we’re looking for drunk drivers,” he adds.

Increasing Arrest Rates Using Passive Alcohol Sensors

There is no doubt that enforcement resources are stretched thin these days given the necessary focus on homeland security, drug interdiction and other enforcement priorities. That’s why increasing the efficiency of existing DWI enforcement and checkpoint patrols is critical.

Detecting alcohol through ambient air is an existing technology that has been demonstrated to increase DWI arrest rates by 50 percent at checkpoints and 10 percent on routine patrols, according to research by Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE). Used as

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Sheriff Craig Webre, Lafourche Parish



Bernalillo County, NM enforcement

a screening tool, passive sensors are really just an extensive of the officer's nose, but are also objective and non-invasive, easy to use and constitutional.

Yet, as with ignition interlocks the passive sensing technology is underutilized by enforcement agencies. Only about 4,000 Passive Alcohol Sensor (PAS) were sold in the past five years and at best, only about 2,000 are in use. PIRE estimates that only 0.4% of enforcement officers currently use this effective technology, based on an estimate of some 500,000 traffic law enforcement officers in the United States.

Sheriff Craig Webre, Lafourche Parish, LA and 1st Vice President of the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA) says, "In a checkpoint scenario you typically

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Sheriff Farrar W. Howard, New Kent County, VA

need to screen a large number of people as quickly as possible. The courts have emphasized that checkpoints must have the lowest level of intrusion and inconvenience to law abiding, non-impaired drivers. Passive sensors help agencies meet this requirement." He also believes that the use of PAS can benefit officer

safety. "I'm convinced that officer safety is enhanced when checkpoint and other interactions are as brief and efficient as possible. A person who must wait 10 minutes for extended screening has time to consider and decide to use force against an officer. Minimizing this potential use of force is very important."

Further, he believes that officers conducting checkpoints must operate under somewhat of a disadvantage in terms of observing typical conditions of impairment. "When drivers are seated in a dark vehicle, often the only clues as to alcohol use are slurred speech and the odor of alcohol. PAS can offer a quick and reliable measure of the presence of alcohol to aid officers in determining which drivers should be screened further," says Sheriff Webre.

Updating Patrol Efforts

Sheriff Farrar W. "Wakie" Howard of New Kent County, VA has put into practice the combined use of frequent, low-manpower checkpoints using passive sensing technology. Recently appointed to the NSA Highway Safety Committee, Sheriff Howard agrees that PAS can be a valuable screening tool for use at checkpoints. "This equipment does not replace the need for field sobriety tests, but can definitely augment detection of alcohol, particularly effective with hard core drinkers who can often mask visible signs of impairment," says Sheriff Howard.

In 2005 the New Kent County Sheriff's Department conducted more than 15 sobriety checkpoints in addition to

directed and saturation DWI patrols. To conduct sobriety checkpoints, New Kent County deploys auxiliary officers and coordinates efforts with the Virginia State Police, James City County Police, Henrico Police and West Point Police Departments. Sheriff Howard's commitment to making roadways in his county safer is clearly communicated to his 15 patrol deputies (32 total sworn deputies in his department). One deputy has an agency record of 49 DWI arrests in one year.

New Mexico Moves In On Drunk Driving

While the national DWI crash statistics showed no progress last year, New Mexico's statistics proved that their efforts are working. The state's alcohol-related injury crashes dropped in 2005 by a stunning 20 percent and overall alcohol-related crashes declined by more than 17 percent.

This progress began with strong lead-

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Sheriff Darren White, Bernalillo County, NM

ership from Governor Bill Richardson and extends through to county and city levels. Governor Richardson made reducing impaired driving a priority for his administration and appointed the nation's first DWI Czar to develop bold initiatives with law enforcement, courts, state agencies, and the media and advocacy groups. Additionally, New Mexico increased penalties and treatment for offenders ramped up statewide high-visibility law enforcement including checkpoints, beefed up enforcement resources, passed the nation's toughest ignition interlock law requiring interlocks for 1st offense DWI, and passed a law to make it a 4th degree felony for those who purchase or give alcohol to a minor.

Sheriff Darren White of Bernalillo County, New Mexico ran for office in

2003 on a platform to reduce drunk driving. Bernalillo County, which includes the city of Albuquerque, is the third largest sheriff department in the state with 268 sworn deputies. When elected, Sheriff White followed through on his promise immediately choosing a sobriety checkpoint as the location for his swearing in ceremony! "As a former DWI patrol officer and former Secretary of New Mexico's Department of Public Safety, I knew we had been successful in the 1990s in reducing drunk driving. But, I felt we were becoming complacent in enforcement efforts. When I took office three and a half years ago, I directed two supervisors to follow DWI citation, crash and other data closely so we could make sure we directed enforcement activity in the best way possible."

Checkpoints and saturation patrols are the key techniques used in Bernalillo County; however, Sheriff White believes in being flexible and using whatever enforcement technique the data warrants. "The deterrent effect of checkpoints can't be underestimated, but when we strategically locate checkpoints we make a substantial number of arrests, as many as 30 in one night," he adds.

Current Technology Available and Future Technology Promising

In pressing for a renewed campaign to stop drunk driving, Mothers Against Drunk Driving pledges to support law enforcement efforts across the U.S. MADD leaders will work to secure resources to compliment stepped up enforcement activities and the more than 400 MADD affiliates will work to acknowledge outstanding efforts locally, support the victims of impaired driving and work to stop underage drinking. In addition, MADD has established a web site to facilitate communication among agencies nationally in order to promote best practices, model legislation and officer support.

"Without doubt, increasing the use of currently available technologies and deterrence techniques could make an immediate and substantial decrease in impaired driving and its tragic consequences," says Chuck Hurley. ★

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Carl J. McDonald, National Law Enforcement Initiative Coordinator for Mothers Against Drunk Driving and Retired with the Wyoming State Patrol, is a veteran of 23 years service in law enforcement. Carl experienced first hand the tragedy impaired drivers cause when an impaired driver killed his young daughter in 1998. Contact Carl at Carl.McDonald@madd.org.

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Mothers Against Drunk Driving pledges to support law enforcement efforts across the U.S.

For more information:

1. "Low-Staffing Sobriety Checkpoints" April 2006 by NHTSA www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/enforce/Low-Staffing_Checkpoints.

2. "The PASpoint System – Passive Sensors at Mini-Checkpoints: Bringing Australia's Random Breath-Test System to the United States" Developed in 2003 by the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE) and published by the Transportation Research Board. www.madd.org/docs/PassiveSensor.pdf

3. MADD Law Enforcement Web Site: Program information designed to help the enforcement community combat drunk driving and underage drinking, www.madd.org/lawenforcement.

4. LEADRS – (Law Enforcement Advanced DUI/WI Reporting System) Texas Municipal Police Association, www.leadrstexas.com.

5. "Creating Impaired Driving General Deterrence *Eight Case Studies of Sustained, High-Visibility, Impaired-Driving Enforcement*" March 2006, www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/alcohol/StopImpaired/Creating_ImpairedDriving/pages/TRD.htm.

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