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Alcohol Ignition Interlock Fact Sheet

Alcohol ignition interlocks save lives.

- Technology currently exists that can eliminate repeat drunk driving and save lives. The breath alcohol ignition interlock prevents a vehicle from being driven by a drunk driver. If used correctly, the device can substantially reduce repeat offenses.[1]

- More than 4,000 lives could be saved if the criminal justice system could prevent those convicted of drunk driving from recommitting their crime. If properly administered, alcohol ignition interlocks could save thousands of lives and give convicted drunk drivers the ability to drive while not endangering the public.[2]

Studies clearly show alcohol ignition interlocks are effective.

- The use of ignition interlocks reduces drunk driving by an average of 65 percent.[3] For example, New Mexico found a decrease in recidivism by over half among first-time convicted offenders – even before it strengthened its alcohol ignition interlock program in 2005.[4]

- Most of the failures of interlocks are legal system failures, where mandatory interlock laws are not enforced and convicted drunk drivers who are sentenced to receive interlocks either do not have them installed or receive little oversight. The model legislation proposed by Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) would alleviate many of these concerns.[5]

The public supports the implementation of alcohol ignition interlocks.

- Support for alcohol ignition interlocks is strong – with 80 percent of the public in favor of using alcohol ignition interlocks for drivers who have been convicted of drunk driving, according to a 2008 AAA poll.[6]

- Offenders themselves believe interlocks are a fair and effective sanction. One study reported that of those sentenced to alcohol ignition interlock devices, 82 percent believed the system was very successful in preventing them from driving after drinking and 68 percent believed it was very successful in changing their drunk driving habits.[7] Similarly, a survey of convicted drunk drivers in Albuquerque found 82 percent felt interlocks were a fair sanction and 79 percent thought interlocks reduced drunk driving.[8]

First offenders are likely to become repeat offenders.

- First-time offenders have driven drunk an average of 87 times before they are arrested and most likely are not social drinkers, but rather have a serious problem with alcohol.[9]

- First-time offenders are likely to have committed the crime before and will commit the crime again unless significant intervention is taken. This intervention, for all convicted drunk drivers, should include an ignition interlock device.

Current sanctions alone are not effective in stopping repeat offenses

- Currently, the most common sanctions for first-time convicted drunk drivers in the United States are fines, license suspensions and assessment and treatment for problems with alcohol.[10]

- Administrative license sanctions alone reduce alcohol-related fatal crashes by an average of nine percent by deterring both the general public and the convicted drunk driver who receives the license sanction. However, they fail to keep unlicensed drivers off the road: Studies estimate that 50 to 75 percent of drunk drivers whose licenses are suspended continue to drive anyway. A strong alcohol ignition interlock program will prevent the suspended convicted drunk driver from operating their vehicle.[11,12]

How interlock technology works

- 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 if the driver has alcohol in his or her system.[13]

- Newer interlocks include features that prevent circumvention and tampering. Advances have also been made to ascertain that the driver is the person providing the air sample. Furthermore, devices require running retests – tests required at random intervals between five and 30 minutes once the vehicle is started. These retests are designed to be done at roadside and effectively help prevent a sober person from starting the vehicle for another person or letting a car idle while alcohol is consumed.[14]

Expanding interlocks for all convicted drunk drivers

- MADD's *Campaign to Eliminate Drunk Driving* supports several approaches to implement greater use of interlocks for all convicted drunk drivers. MADD is undertaking an aggressive state legislative strategy to push for new state laws to be enacted to require interlock use by all drunk drivers, including first-time convicted drunk drivers.

- MADD's model state legislation includes a compliance revision. An interlock should remain installed in a vehicle until the convicted person can adequately demonstrate sober driving through an interlock or electronic monitoring. If a convicted drunk driver fails a test, their interlock installation should be extended to match the initial interlock period (e.g., 150 days for a first conviction).

- 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.[15]

[1] MADD, *Stopping Drunk Driving Before It Starts: A Technological Solution*.
[2] MADD, *Stopping Drunk Driving Before It Starts: A Technological Solution*.
[3] Willis, C., Lybrand, S., & Bellamy, N. "Alcohol Ignition Interlock Programs for Reducing Drunk Driving Recidivism." Cochran Database of Systematic Reviews (2005).
[4] Voas, Robert, Paul Marues, and Richard Roth. "Evidence that Interlocks Are Effective with First Offenders.: *6th Annual Ignition Interlock Symposium*, 2005.
<http://www.tirf.ca/whatNew/newsItemPDFs/Bob_Voas.pdf >
[5] MADD, *Stopping Drunk Driving Before It Starts: A Technological Solution*.
[6] AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. "2008 Traffic Safety Culture Index" Washington DC: AAA Foundation, April 2008. http://www.aaafoundation.org/pdf/2008TSCIndexFinalReport.pdf.
[7] Morse, BJ and DS Elliott. *Hamilton County Drinking and Driving Study: 30 Month Report*. Boulder, Colorado: University of Colorado, 1990.
[8] Roth, Richard. *7th Annual Ignition Interlock Symposium*. Vail, CO, 2006.
[9] Zador, Paul, Sheila Drawchuk, and B. Moore. (1997) "Drinking and Driving Trips, Stops by Police, and Arrests: Analysis of the 1995 National Survey of Drinking and Driving Attitudes and Behavior," Rockville, MD: Estat, Inc, 1997.
[10] MADD, *Stopping Drunk Driving Before It Starts: A Technological Solution*.
[11] Nichols, James, and H. Lawrence Ross. "The Effectiveness of Legal Sanctions in Dealing with Drinking Drivers." *Alcohol, Drugs and Driving* 6(2) (1990): 33-55.
[12] Peck, Raymond, R. Jean Wilson, and Lawrence Sutton. "Driver License Strategies for Controlling the Persistent DUI Offender," *Strategies for Dealing with the Persistent Drinking Driver. Transportation Research Board, Transportation Research Circular No. 437*. Washington, D.C.: National Research Council, 1995.
[13] MADD, *International Technology Symposium: A Nation without Drunk Driving Summary Report*. November, 2006: pg 4.
[14] MADD, *Stopping Drunk Driving Before It Starts: A Technological Solution*.
[15] Ibid, pg 4.