

JUNE: **NATIONAL SOBRIETY CHECKPOINT**

Every year in the U.S., nearly 13,000 people are killed by drunk drivers with an illegal alcohol level of .08 BAC (blood alcohol concentration) or greater. That means that every month, more than 1,000 families must face the tragic consequences of drunk driving – and that number only represents the deaths associated with driving drunk, not including all those who are injured but survive with permanent disabilities, and those whose lives are turned upside down by loss of income, fines and imprisonment...

A recently published editorial – “Ignition locks are worth long look” in the *Sacramento Bee* (April 28, 2009) – tells the story of a 54-year old man’s death following an accident involving a woman now charged with murder, drunken driving and attempting to leave the scene of an accident – her fourth drunk driving arrest since 1994.

Accidents such as the one described leave us wondering whether current penalties for driving under the influence (“DUI”) are effective deterrents. In 2007, there were 203,866 drunk driving arrests in California, involving more than 53,000 collisions in which 1,501 people were killed.

The editorial raises questions about the use of ignition interlocks: cell-phone-size breath-alcohol-testing devices that can be affixed to the steering column in a car owned or operated by a convicted drunken driver – a driver blows into the device to demonstrate he/she is alcohol free.. if the device detects alcohol, the car can’t be started.

Under current law, judges in California *may* (not *must*) require convicted drunk drivers to install such devices on cars they own or operate as a condition of probation. Pending legislation would establish a pilot program that would make the devices mandatory for all first-time DUI convictions in five counties – Orange, Alameda, Los Angeles, Sacramento and San Diego.

A 1998 Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) study of interlocking ignition devices concluded that they “are not effective in reducing DUI convictions or incidents for first-

time DUI offenders.” However, the same study suggested that they could be effective for repeat drunken drivers under certain circumstances: second-time DUI offenders who serve half of their suspended license period and then install the device in order to obtain a restricted driver’s license have a lower risk of DUI recidivism than their counterparts who remain suspended, research has shown.



IF SOMEONE YOU KNOW DRINKS AND DRIVES....

Drunk driving is the most frequently committed violent crime in the United States. Thousands are killed and a half million are injured each year as a result of drunk driving (NHTSA statistics). In this country, about 18 million people (8.5% of the population) meet the criteria for alcohol abuse or alcoholism (NIAAA, 2004). They may be wonderful people, but their behavior is unacceptable.

IMPAIRMENT VS. INTOXICATION...

Impairment is the point at which one’s intake of alcohol or other drugs affects their ability to perform appropriately – this is a process that begins with the very first drink. While they may not *appear* to be impaired, their judgment, coordination and reaction time have been affected. Intoxication, on the other hand, is a legal term that establishes a level of alcohol in the bloodstream which is severe enough so that criminal sanctions are enforced. In the U.S., the level of legal intoxication is .08 BAC. *For those under the age of 21, it is illegal to drink and illegal to drive with any measurable alcohol in the bloodstream.*

TAKING ACTION...

- Designate a driver – a person who agrees not to use alcohol or other drugs through the day or evening ...if selected prior to the event, he can pick everyone up so no one is tempted later to drive home after drinking.
- Plan on public transportation – if your group does not have a designated driver, drinkers should plan to use public transportation: most bars and restaurants are more than happy to call a cab for their patrons.
- Be smart at home – when the drinker is in your home, develop a transportation plan before the drinking starts: if the drinker becomes belligerent, you can consider hiding the car keys, letting the air out of their tires, removing the distributor cap, or even moving the car!
- Contact local law enforcement – if the person of your concern continues to drink and drive, call the police immediately after he/she leaves and give a description of the car, driver and direction of travel!
- Don’t blame yourself, and don’t allow the alcoholic to blame you for their predicament.
- Never ride with a person who has been drinking – this protects you and sends a clear message that you will not tolerate such behaviors.

For more information, go to
www.madd.org and www.niaaa.nih.gov

STATES' IGNITION INTERLOCK LAW STATUS: 2009	
Mandatory all convictions	Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Utah, Louisiana, Nebraska, New Mexico, Washington
Mandatory to reinstate license	Oregon
Mandatory for high BAC and repeat offenses	Florida, Hawaii, Kansas, New Hampshire, Virginia, West Virginia, Wyoming
Mandatory for other specific offenses	California, Idaho, Texas, Oklahoma, Iowa, Missouri, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, So. Carolina, New Jersey, Maryland, Massachusetts
Allowed, not mandatory	Nevada, Montana, No. Dakota, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine New York, Tennessee, Georgia, No. Carolina, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Delaware, Wash DC
No laws	So. Dakota, Alabama, Vermont