IIHS HLDI | SAFETY SOLUTION

Mandating ignition interlocks

Laws requiring all DUI/DWI offenders to install ignition interlocks reduce impaired-driving fatalities

License suspensions are an essential tool in the fight against impaired driving. However, the reality is that many offenders continue to drive while their license is suspended.[1] Repeat offenses are also common.

Requiring alcohol ignition interlocks for all drivers as a condition for driving during the suspension period and for license reinstatement can help.

An alcohol ignition interlock consists of a breath-testing unit connected to a vehicle's ignition. To start the vehicle, the driver must blow into the device and register a blood alcohol reading that is below a predetermined level. If the blood alcohol reading exceeds this level, the interlock prevents the vehicle from starting. Periodic retests are required to continue operation.

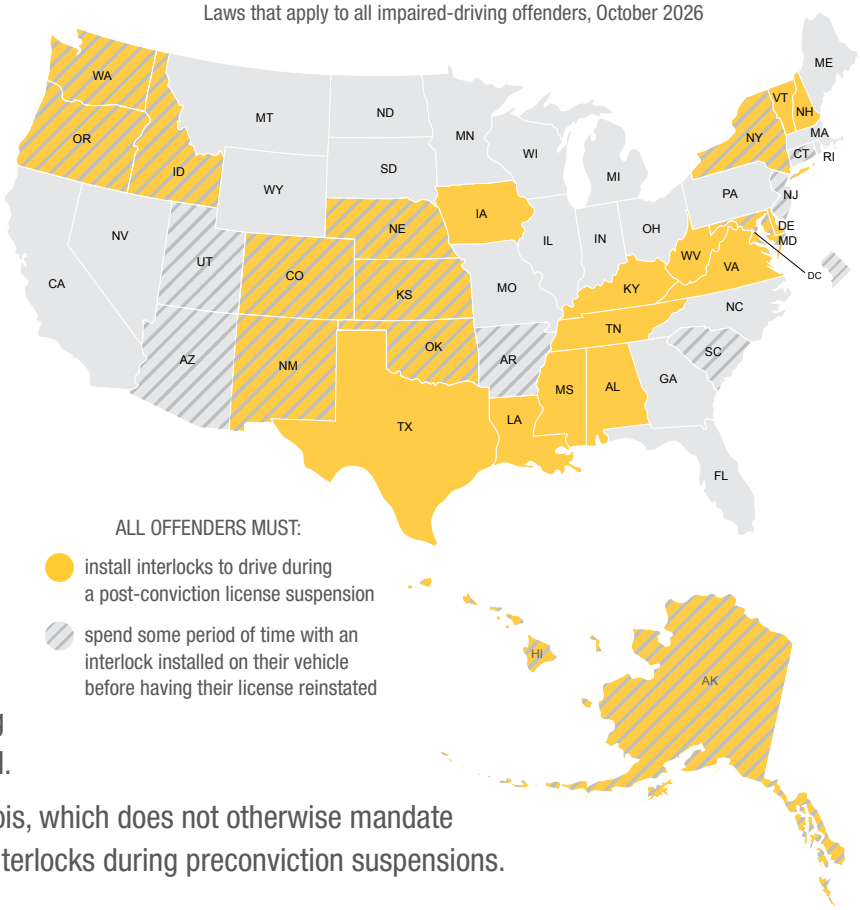
Research has shown that interlocks reduce recidivism by more than 60% while they're installed on the offender's vehicle.[2] But when they're required and how often they're actually installed varies significantly from state to state.

Required, incentivized or ignored?

Across the United States, the usual penalty for an alcohol-impaired driving conviction includes a fine and a license suspension or revocation. Some states grant hardship licenses that allow offenders to drive only to and from work or under other limited circumstances during the suspension period. Ignition interlocks can offer assurance that the person is driving sober.

U.S. ALCOHOL INTERLOCK REQUIREMENTS

Laws that apply to all impaired-driving offenders, October 2026



- About half of the states have laws requiring all offenders, including first-time offenders, to use interlocks as a condition of their restricted license during post-conviction license suspensions. In this context, "required" means that there are no hardship licenses or any other paths to legal driving other than installing an interlock during the suspension period.
- Twelve of those states — as well as Illinois, which does not otherwise mandate interlocks for first offenders — require interlocks during preconviction suspensions.

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- Other jurisdictions require interlocks for all offenders for license reinstatement but not during license suspensions. Some jurisdictions, such as Connecticut, the District of Columbia, South Carolina and Utah, do not allow any driving during the pre- or post-conviction suspension period or both.
- Some jurisdictions still grant hardship licenses without requiring interlocks, while others only mandate interlocks for repeat offenders or those caught with especially high blood alcohol levels (usually 0.15% or higher). The latter include California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wyoming.
- Only seven states (Indiana, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota and Wisconsin) have no mandatory interlock requirements. Nevada and Rhode Island, however, require an offender to participate in a 24/7 sobriety program that includes twice daily testing for alcohol if the offender does not get an interlock.
- A number of jurisdictions incentivize interlocks by shortening or eliminating the "hard suspension" (i.e. no driving at all) for offenders who install them. However, they still offer offenders other paths to continued driving under a restricted license.

Keys to effectiveness

- A national IIHS study showed that alcohol-related fatal crash rates were substantially lower when states had the broadest interlock requirements.[3]
  - Compared with no interlock law, interlock laws that applied to all convicted drivers, including first offenders, resulted in a 26% drop in the number of drivers with a 0.08% BAC who were involved in fatal crashes.
  - Laws that applied only to repeat offenders were associated with a much smaller 9% drop, while laws requiring them for repeat offenders and high-BAC offenders were associated with a 20% reduction.
- Even where interlocks are required to drive while suspended, the installation rate is far from 100%, as many drivers choose not to drive (at least legally) during their suspensions. Well-designed laws can boost installation rates, an IIHS study of legal changes in Washington state showed.[4]
  - Requiring interlocks for first offenders raised installation rates 6%.
  - Requiring ignition interlocks during preconviction administrative license suspensions increased installation rates by 3%.
  - Shifting responsibility for issuing interlock orders from the courts to the department of licensing increased installation rates by 3%.
  - Eliminating opportunities for offenders to plead down to avoid an interlock requirement could also help. Washington saw a spike in the proportion of DUIs that were downgraded to alcohol-related reckless or negligent driving convictions after the state began requiring interlocks for first offenders.

REFERENCES

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