

**Statement before the New Jersey
Senate Judiciary Committee**

Alcohol Ignition Interlocks

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The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety is a nonprofit research and communications organization that identifies ways to reduce the deaths, injuries, and property damage on our nation's highways. We are supported by the nation's automobile insurers. I am submitting for the record Institute research on the effectiveness of ignition interlocks in reducing recidivism among people convicted of alcohol-impaired driving (DUI) and results of a national telephone survey showing strong support for requiring interlocks for DUI offenders.

Risks of Driving Under the Influence

The probability of a fatal crash rises significantly after 0.05 percent blood alcohol concentration (BAC) and even more rapidly after 0.08 percent.¹ Drivers with BACs at or above 0.15 percent are at very high risk of dying in a crash or sustaining severe injury.^{1,2} Progress has been made during the past 30 years to reduce the numbers and proportions of fatally injured drivers with BACs at or above 0.08 percent. Since 1982 there has been a 35 percent decline in the percentage of passenger vehicle drivers killed in crashes who had BACs at or above 0.08 percent. There also has been a substantial decline (34 percent) in the percentage of fatally injured passenger vehicle drivers with BACs at or above 0.15 percent.

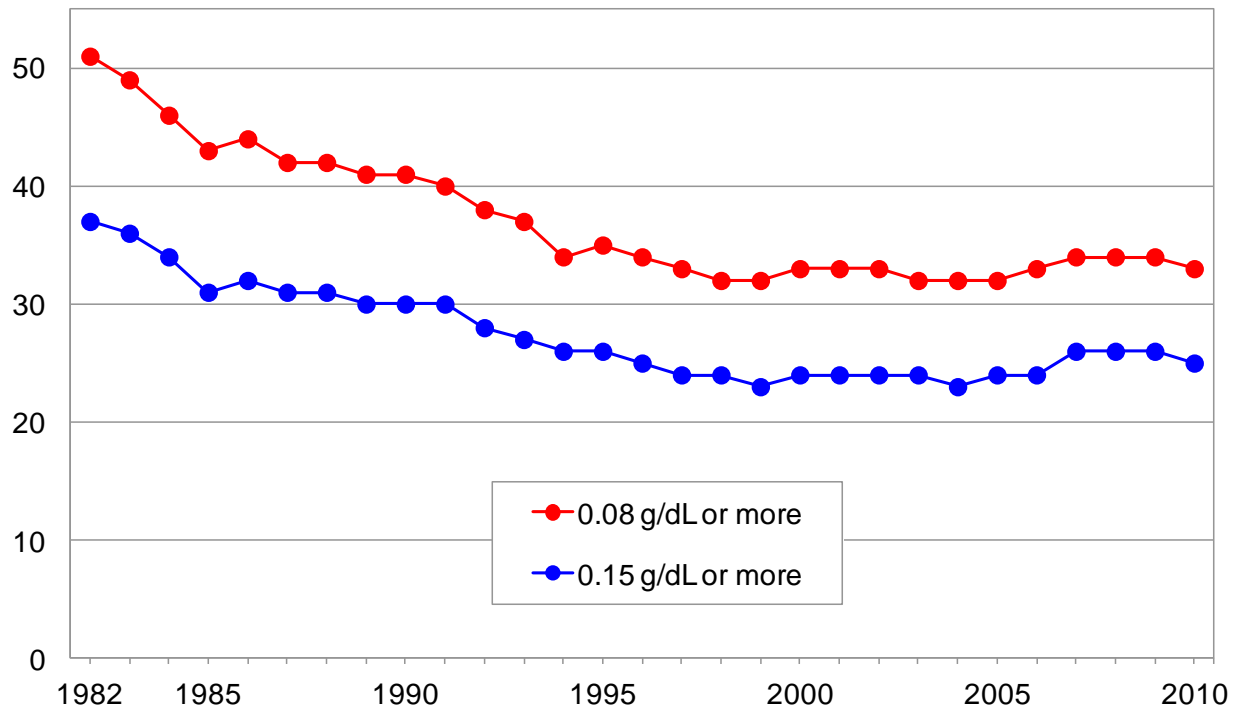
However, this progress occurred before the mid-1990s. Since then, little headway has been made, so alcohol-impaired driving still is a major problem. Consistently since the mid-1990s, about a third of crash deaths have occurred in crashes in which at least one driver had a BAC at or above 0.08 percent. In 2005, Institute research estimated that 8,916 deaths would have been prevented if all drivers on the road had BACs lower than 0.08 percent.³ Applying the same methods yields an estimate of 7,082 preventable deaths in 2010 if BACs had been below 0.08 percent.⁴

Why Deterrence is So Important

Most alcohol-impaired drivers never are stopped. Others are stopped, but police may miss signs of impairment. Estimates of the chance of arrest when driving with a BAC at or above 0.08 percent range from small (about 1 in 50) to miniscule (1 in 480).^{5,6,7,8} This means the average first-time offender is likely to have driven under the influence many times before conviction, and the arrest leading to the conviction usually is simply the first time the offender has been apprehended, not the first time the offense was committed.

There are not enough police to apprehend all drivers impaired by alcohol, so efforts are ongoing to go beyond traditional enforcement and deter potential offenders before they drive. One way

**Percent of Fatally Injured Passenger Vehicle Drivers
with BACs At or Above Specified Thresholds, 1982-2010**



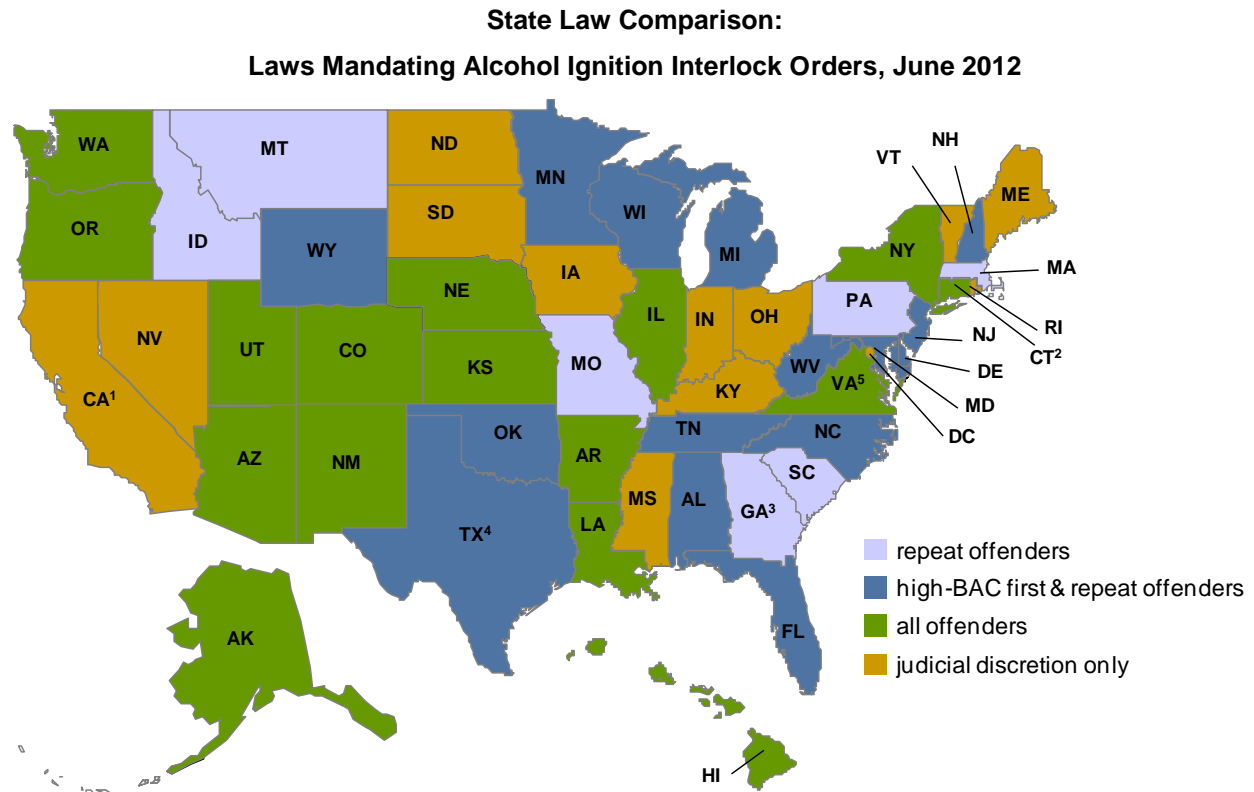
involves ignition interlocks, and almost all states permit some offenders to drive only if their vehicles have been equipped with such devices. By analyzing drivers' breath and disabling the ignition if a would-be driver has been drinking, interlocks help take some of the burden of enforcement off police and allow technology to consistently prevent drivers from operating vehicles while under the influence of alcohol.

State Laws Regarding Interlocks

All 50 states and the District of Columbia have, at a minimum, laws giving courts or driver licensing agencies the discretion to require drivers convicted of DUI to install ignition interlocks to drive during license suspension and/or for specified time periods before full relicensure. 7 states add to this minimum and make the interlock restrictions mandatory for repeat offenders. Going further, 15 states make the restrictions mandatory for repeat offenders and offenders with high BACs. And going furthest, 16 states and 4 California counties make the interlock restrictions mandatory for all people convicted of DUI, including first-timers. To illustrate among the states the varying triggering offense at which ignition interlocks become mandatory, please refer to the map below.

Interlocks Reduce Recidivism

Studies have shown that alcohol ignition interlocks are effective in reducing recidivism among people convicted of impaired driving while installed on their vehicles.^{9,10} In the most recent studies comparing recidivism rates among offenders who installed interlocks and those who did not



¹ California's pilot program requires interlocks for all DUI offenders in Alameda, Los Angeles, Sacramento, and Tulare counties.

² Connecticut's law requiring interlocks for all DUI offenders will be effective December 1, 2012.

³ In Georgia, interlocks are mandatory for high-BAC offenders unless the court waives the requirement due to financial hardship.

⁴ Texas requires interlocks for high-BAC offenders as a condition of suspending the prison sentence.

⁵ Virginia's law requiring interlocks for all DUI offenders will be effective July 1, 2012.

install them, recidivism rates were reduced by 60 percent¹¹ and by 80 percent while¹² interlocks were installed. Reductions have been found for both repeat and first-time offenders,^{13,14,15} but the benefits dissipate when the interlocks are removed.^{16,17,18}

A 2012 Institute study examined the broad effects of an all-offender interlock requirement on all offenders covered by the law, not just the offenders who elect to install interlocks. The research found that after Washington state expanded its interlock requirement to every first-time DUI offender, the interlock installation rate among first-time DUI offenders affected by the law change increased dramatically as a result, and the 2-year recidivism rate for the offenders affected by

the expansion fell 12 percent.¹⁹ One-third of the offenders affected by the law change installed interlocks after the law change, compared with less than 5 percent before the law change. Researchers estimate that if all first-time DUI offenders had installed an interlock, the 2-year recidivism rate would have fallen by nearly half.¹⁹

Applying an interlock requirement to all first-time offenders, not just repeat offenders or those with very high BACs, would capture a much larger population of at-risk drivers. It is estimated that about two-thirds of US drivers arrested for DUI have no prior convictions.²⁰ A recent study in Maryland found that 58 percent of DUI offenders during 1999-2004 were drivers with no prior violations.²¹ In the Institute's study in Washington, among people arrested for DUI and subsequently convicted, about three-quarters were first-time offenders. It is estimated that about half of drivers arrested or convicted of DUI in the United States have BACs less than 0.15 percent.²² About one-quarter of passenger vehicle drivers with illegal BACs (0.08 percent or higher) who died in crashes in 2010 had BACs lower than 0.15 percent.²³ Furthermore, Institute researchers estimate that about 785 crash deaths nationally would have been prevented in 2010 if all drivers with DUI offenses within the past 3 years had been restricted to zero BACs. Over 140 deaths would have been prevented if only drivers with more than 1 prior DUI offense had been restricted to zero BACs.⁴

Public Support for Interlocks

A 2009 national telephone survey conducted by the Institute assessed attitudes toward in-vehicle alcohol detection technology.²⁴ Seventy-two percent of respondents said they had heard about alcohol ignition interlocks for cars of convicted DUI offenders. Eighty-four percent thought requiring interlocks for offenders is a good or very good idea.

Conclusion

Alcohol ignition interlocks are proven deterrents to repeat DUI offenses, not only for repeat or very high-BAC offenders but also for offenders convicted of their first DUI offense. Reductions in DUI offenses would be greater if all offenders, not just repeat offenders or those with very high BACs, were required to install interlocks. The public understands the importance of this technology to prevent deaths and injuries from DUI crashes.

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