

# Alcohol-Interlock from the Alcohol Offender's Point of View

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*Vienna-Graz,  
January 2015*

### Summary

Alcohol-interlock devices are currently in use in several countries and as a result, we have the necessary know-how of their operation.

Why do we discuss rehabilitation and/or toxicologic control of alcohol consumers? Although the alcohol-interlock device prevents drunk-driving, we cannot settle for this and instead, a farsighted, holistic approach in the field of traffic security is required.

The long-term success of the intervention of the alcohol-interlock could only be asserted if drunk driving were to cease after the alcohol-interlock has been removed. However, studies by Marques et al (2003), Clip (2009), Nickel & Schubert (2012) and Hauser et al (2014) have led to the following conclusion: an additional psychological intervention is required since the effect of the alcohol-interlock (a device that is equated with typical punishment as imprisonment or fines) appears limited (see Marques & Voas, 2012):

*„An interlock program is not a therapeutic behavioural change program. DUI offenders may drink more strategically to avoid interlock lockouts, but they do not drink less. Accordingly, monitoring authorities that want to achieve abstinence could make better use of the interlock period, while drinking is held somewhat in check. A Texan study showed interlock participants under court order were amenable to a motivational intervention in which counselors use and discuss the alcohol-interlock BAC data.*

*Harm reduction is also an option, preserving the behavioral adaptation to the interlock (reduced drinking and driving) without targeting drinking directly. What do interlock users do differently to avoid BAC lockouts? Little is known about their coping methods but with drinking and driving both unchanged, offenders are making changes that avoid limiting either. A study of those adjustments might help us develop interventions.”*

The main positive impact of interlocks is the criterion of a long-term change, i.e. the drivers using their vehicles in a sober state after the alcohol-interlock has been removed. However, according to a report from the EU, most programs lose their beneficial effects once the device has been removed (Bax, Kärki, Evers, and Mathijssen Bernhoft, 2001). Therefore, as recommended by this EU group, in the case of the alcohol-interlock being installed, it must be operated only in combination with rehabilitation programs, so that the long-term impact of the measure can be secured. In order to achieve this, the manner in which alcohol is handled must be fundamentally changed. In Austria, legal implementation of the rehabilitation programs have been put in place in order to change attitudes and to achieve behavior changes.

The evaluation studies of the rehabilitation programs demonstrate that the probability of relapse was halved already during the legal probation (see internationally as the EU project DRUID, Bukasa et al 2008). One of the studies conducted in Austria by the KfV (Schützenhöfer & Krainz, 1999), for example, shows that three years after the completion of the rehabilitation training, 22.7% of the drivers have relapsed while in the control group who had no additional training, it was 42.2%.

In the presented survey with 324 training participants, 85 % of participants (= 282 persons) reported that, following the training, they have had their alcohol consumption actually reduced, and around 90% of them (= 299 persons) developed a new drinking-driving strategy within approx. one month of the training. The general opinion was that a sole installation of alcohol-interlock would not motivate them.

From the traffic psychological perspective, there is another aspect that speaks against the use of interlocks for individuals: the withdrawal of the driving license has, in addition to the preventive effect, a very pragmatic benefit; for it is only when people have no car at their disposal they consider other opportunities that are available to them without car. Many of them have never dealt with public transport system, and have no idea how to use it. Since they only know how to drive car, their barriers to use other transport are big due to a lack of knowledge and experience. They acquire this knowledge only after they lose the license. The new experience with the use of public transport allow to develop new drinking-driving strategies, that do not require a car.

### ***Interlock – does not secure the professional integration***

The reasons for the installation of alcohol-interlock as frequently cited by authorities are that illegal driving would be prevented and that in doing so people would be supported in executing their professional obligations. This opinion is based on the assumption that illegal (drunk) driving happen primarily in order to maintain the job. Our survey, however, shows that illegal drivers use their vehicles mainly for private purposes and not for professional reasons. In addition, there is the hypothesis - from the traffic-psychological perspective - that illegal drivers have a low norm-consciousness; this, among other reasons, can be used as an explanation for their risky behavior. It can therefore be assumed that the target group of illegal drivers would bypass the installed alcohol interlock in their own car by using another car instead. The installation of an interlock in a truck ensures that the truck can be driven only by a sober driver. The installation of an interlock in a private car does not offer this security, the intoxicated driver can be back on the road. As a rule, people have access to several vehicles. According to our survey the average are three cars (company car, partner's or parents' car,...).

Despite all the technical possibilities in a vehicle it cannot be forgotten that it is still a human being who moves the vehicle or outsmarts the control. If drunk-driving should be eliminated from the streets, the problem must be addressed directly in humans.

### ***Alcohol-interlock - favoring the big income earners***

An alcohol-interlock in the car entails high costs for the installation and maintenance. It is mostly the high income earners who can afford the pricey installation of the interlock in their car instead of losing the license for a long period of time. The economic disparity favors those (drunk-drivers) who can buy the interlock and therefore "pay" for shortening the time of the license withdrawal.

### ***Alcohol-interlock – the visibility***

Blowing into the breathalyzers in public (while for instance collecting children from the kindergarten or school, at the gas station or in the company car park in front of colleagues) is for more than half of the respondents considered embarrassing. Currently, there is also a number of unresolved private data protection issues related to the alcohol-interlocks.

Taking into consideration the experience of other countries and from the psychological perspective, the installation of alcohol-interlocks for professional drivers is a very useful measure. Unlike for private drivers where the advantages cannot be attributed, based on the existing state of knowledge; a safe assumption is that road safety is not improved because of the lapse of the preventive-deterrent effect of the license withdrawal - unless this technical measure is linked with an in-depth psychological support of trained professionals. Moreover, an evaluation of the measure over a long period of time, carried out by independent experts, is absolutely necessary.

### ***Résumé:***

- Alcohol-interlocks are effective as long as they remain installed;
- Without a simultaneous psychological support the positive effect of alcohol-interlock disappears after its removal because no lasting change in attitudes and behavior has been achieved.
- The number of illegal drives within the presented sample of N = 324 was less than 10 percent. These drives were mainly done for private purposes and **not** for professional reasons. Therefore the argument favoring alcohol-interlock to limit work-related (drunk) driving cannot be supported.
- The affected drivers conceded having several vehicles at their disposal - the alcohol-interlocks can thus be easily avoided.
- More than half of the respondents were concerned with their private data protection.
- More than half of the respondents would be embarrassed to be seen blowing into the breathalyzer when starting the car.

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