

ALCOHOL INTERLOCK CURRICULUM

for Practitioners

IMPLEMENTATION: Instructor Material

Why this diversity has occurred

Alcohol interlock applications have developed rather independently across jurisdictions and this has resulted in considerable diversity in implementation strategies. This diversity has occurred for two main reasons. First, to date, research efforts have focused more on measures of overall effectiveness and reductions in recidivism. As a consequence, research to determine what core features are needed to develop an effective application has been secondary and is still ongoing. Second, implementing agencies have somewhat different functions and authority across jurisdictions. These agencies have received limited guidance regarding the development of these applications and critical policies and practices that should be considered and included when applications are being developed. Collectively, this has meant that the implementation of alcohol interlock applications has evolved using more of a trial and error process.

The consequences of this unstructured approach have been negative and significant. As evidence of this, less than 10% of impaired driving offenders (an estimated 1.3 million offenders are arrested annually according to FBI statistics) are subject to an alcohol interlock due to a variety of loopholes in the implementation process that essentially allow them to “opt out” of supervision with this device. Simply speaking, offenders are able to “opt out” of these applications because of poor or inconsistent communication among agencies involved in the delivery of alcohol interlock devices, which makes it difficult to determine whether offenders actually installed the device. Of concern, research shows that 20-25% of offenders fail to install the interlock despite being ordered to do so (EMT Group 1990; DeYoung 2002). Compounding this problem, there is also evidence to suggest that not all justice practitioners order offenders to install the device, even when they are mandated by law to require the device.

Perhaps of greatest concern, even when alcohol interlocks are installed, the monitoring of offender behaviour is inconsistent. As a result, valuable opportunities to respond to persistent attempts to drink and drive, or to reinforce compliance with the device are lost. Although monitoring behaviour and providing feedback to offenders is a critical element of alcohol interlock applications, the importance of this monitoring and feedback function is often overlooked.

Of equal importance, loopholes in the implementation process also enable offenders to drive unlicensed, placing the public at substantial risk. Indeed, it is estimated that some 75% of suspended, revoked and unlicensed drivers continue to drive anyway (Waller 1985; Hagen et al. 1980; Sadler and Perrine 1984; Peck et al. 1985; Ross and Gonzales 1988; Griffin III and De La Zerda 2000). This is not surprising given the inability of police to consistently identify unlicensed and/or alcohol interlock-restricted drivers and the competing enforcement priorities that they must balance.

As a consequence, the ability of these applications to reduce the drunk driving problem has been limited and the promise of these devices remains unfulfilled. Jurisdictions have been unable to realize the significant reductions in recidivism that average 65% while the device is installed (Morse and Elliott 1992).

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The good news is that efforts are currently underway to address these shortcomings. Research is ongoing to identify effective features of programs. At the same time, collaborative initiatives involving researchers, practitioners, and government agencies are underway to develop much-needed guidelines for applications based on existing knowledge. This work is essential to improve the quality of new and/or existing programs and to ensure that the potential of these devices to reduce impaired driving is maximized.