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# TRAFFIC TECH

## Technology Transfer Series



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## Interlock Data Utilization

Driving-while-impaired (DWI) offenders present a high risk to traffic safety. Alcohol ignition interlocks are now widely used for DWI offenders and can significantly reduce DWI recidivism while on the offender's vehicle. In a typical year an interlock device can collect and store up to 2,500 breath alcohol concentration (BrAC) tests. This breath-test data collected by the interlock device can then be used to help manage convicted DWI offenders.

This descriptive study explores the current use of ignition interlock data for DWI offender monitoring and offender-related programs, such as screening, assessments, and treatment for alcohol abuse problems. It also examines the effectiveness of using the interlock data to reduce alcohol-impaired-driving recidivism. The researcher team collected information from a variety of sources involved with alcohol interlock programs and provide in-depth descriptions for a number of key interlock issues.

### Interlock Data Reporting Variations

A number of factors contribute to the lack of uniformity in interlock data-reporting systems. There are 10 to 12 interlock companies marketing devices and these vendors' devices have a variety of operational differences. In addition, each State has its own specific requirements for reporting and certifying an average of 5 to 6 vendors, which produces a vast lack of uniformity in reporting. Each vendor issues reports in different report formats with information arranged differently and sometimes defined differently using different filtering methods. Vendors deliver reports in a variety of methods (online, e-mail, facsimile) to one or more authorized recipients that monitor DWI offenders and who have differing levels of training on data interpretation. Recipients may include probation, DMV staff, case managers, and a limited number of treatment providers.

### State Interlock Laws and Performance Standards

The definitions of interlock violations or combinations of violations that trigger consequences among the State administrative programs vary. There is no strong common trend; however, some States recognize that interlock users need an initial grace period to learn how the device works and how to avoid lock-outs. The most common reason for violations is missed retests. Elevated BrACs, which may be caused by mouth alcohol, is another common violation. Most States provide avenues for administrative appeals. Violations for court-ordered and court-monitored interlocks are handled case-by-case, depending on the conditions of probation; policies and the philosophies

of probation officers, prosecutors, and judges. Acceptance of interlock BrAC readings vary by courts, with the courts in at least one State not accepting these readings as evidentiary.

There is strong evidence that several measures of interlock performance predict future recidivism, thus it is logical to measure interlock performance and design interventions for poor performers while they are still on the interlock in order to reduce future recidivism. The most used intervention for poor performers is extension of their time on the interlock. Research on the effectiveness of such extensions is limited. New biomarker evidence indicates that alcohol use remains constant throughout the interlock period. The ability to use performance measures to manage DWI offenders will continue to be limited until there is a better understanding of the process offenders go through in adapting or failing to adapt to driving with an interlock.

### Interlock Data Use Monitoring

Interlock technology is growing rapidly. The integration of cell-based real-time reporting systems, the use of photography and face recognition for verification of the breath-sample provider, and recording of vehicle location with GPS is now available. These new technologies are changing the type and increasing the amount of data available for monitoring interlock users; however, it appears that little interlock information is currently being used in offender monitoring. Interlock vendor websites are now available that can be accessed with proper authorization, but court staff generally still rely on vendor e-mail violation reports. There is also a trend toward the automated upload of data from vendors to central State databases, but the staff resources required to monitor and verify violations are still substantial.

There is a lack of consensus on the type of interlock data monitoring that is most cost-effective, and developing a transfer plan for all vendors so that a State can process all data centrally is a complicated and expensive process. Nevertheless, it provides the State with the ability to process a large volume of offender interlock data more consistently than in the past. Generally, costs and staffing levels appear to be affected by the level of vendor involvement in filtering the data for violations and other administrative functions; the more the reliance on vendor filtering and assistance in performing administrative functions, the more costs can be reduced. Vendor filtering of data can introduce many inconsistencies, however, and relatively little attention has been given to the problem of the quality of filtering

services provided by vendors and the methods for improving the rate of false positives.

Several factors appear to be important in determining the extent to which offender monitoring includes interlock data: State law or court policy, court and motor vehicle department resources and staffing levels, level of vendor data screening, and the extent integration of counseling and treatment programs and the interlock program. Sometimes turf and cost issues and technical capabilities between the courts and the States' driver licensing agencies can naturally arise and prevent coordination and data sharing. The use of interlocks and interlock data in a court setting is very different from procedures used by administrative programs, and practices vary widely within and among court jurisdictions.

### Interlock Data Use for Referrals and Treatment

A major limitation in the effectiveness of interlock programs is the tendency of interlock users to return to driving after drinking once they no longer have an interlock on their vehicle. It appears that offenders are not dealing with their underlying drinking problem while on the interlock. This suggests the need to combine treatment for alcohol use disorders with the interlock program, a need recognized for some time but rarely realized because of the lack of coordination of sanctioning and treatment programs for DWI offenders. An education and treatment program is a standard feature of DWI sanctioning programs in all the States, but treatment programs specifically designed for application to interlock users are rare. Because of the traditional separation of interlock and treatment programs, information on the interlock sanctions imposed and the status of the offender's compliance with them may not flow to the treatment provider. Integrated programs are rare. There is little awareness among treatment professionals about the possible value of interlock data reports to provide objective feedback on client behavior. Only recently, with the growth of DWI courts, have treatment programs been brought into the sanction management process.

### Recommendations and Conclusions

Based on this exploration of the use of ignition interlock data to monitor DWI offenders, it is clear that the data are widely used, but there are substantial differences among jurisdictions in the extent of usage. The study identified a number of program areas that can be enhanced to improve the use of interlock data for program management, offender treatment, and evaluation. Recommendations include:

1. Developing more efficient automated data delivery,
2. Expanding the range of professionals that share and use the data,

3. More consistent data definitions across vendors, especially with regard to definitions of interlock violations,
4. More uniformity in data reporting formats, vocabulary and content to make it easier for users to see behavior patterns in the data,
5. Better and more standardized criteria for reporting nonuse of interlock vehicles by offenders,
6. Encouraging more collaboration among authorities, vendors, and treatment providers and removing legal and administrative obstacles that preclude treatment providers access to interlock reports,
7. Adjusting treatment timing so that offenders can install interlocks while they are in treatment rather than requiring completion of treatment prior to getting an interlock, and
8. Developing guidelines to help probation and treatment professionals, prosecutors and judges use interlock data to better identify patterns of behavior and the need for interventions.

Interlock and treatment programs must also address work force and cost issues. Ultimately, resources will dictate how States approach interlock data monitoring and use. A significant cost factor will be the extent that interlock vendors are relied on to do data filtering (validating violations), thereby relieving the government of that expense, and possibly placing it on the offender through user fees. States and courts will also need assistance in setting up data management systems that will assist in tracking interlock success and contain important data elements for evaluation. Finally, research is needed to evaluate the use of interlock data in program management and offender treatment and to determine the extent to which treatment should be based on interlock performance rather than specifying it for all offenders.

### How to Order

To order *Interlock Data Utilization* (280 pages), prepared by Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, write to the Office of Behavioral Safety Research, NPD-310, NHTSA, 1200 New Jersey Avenue SE., Washington, DC 20590, fax 202-366-2766, or download from [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov).

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