

Minimising mishaps during your interlock program

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Oh no, not another lockout!

The aim of this article is to provide some tips about how you can avoid mishaps whilst on an interlock program. I am an assessor with Aussie Drink Drive and have been assessing people's alcohol use in relation to an Interlock condition removal as well as running education programs around alcohol consumption and driving for the past 7 years. This experience provides me with a clear overview of where mistakes are commonly made.

Why are interlocks imposed?

The introduction of a law that requires interlock devices be imposed on those caught drink driving has (for the most part) resolved the problem of drink driving, at least for those to whom an interlock condition applies. There are many who object to this ruling largely because of costs associated with installing and maintaining an interlock, as well as the social stigma and inconvenience of having it installed on one's car. From the point of view of the government however, an interlock device makes license restoration possible in two ways.

1. An interlock device is a learning tool.

An interlock device is a useful learning tool. It provides a very clear, evidence based view of problem areas related to drinking which an individual may be unaware of. An interlock device collects detailed information about an individual's drinking and driving behaviour. Having this information can help raise awareness of problematic drinking in relation to driving and can assist an individual to develop new behaviours around alcohol use. The information an interlock gathers can also be helpful when learning to apply strategies in order to separate drinking from driving.

2. An interlock device aids in re establishing the credibility of a drink driving offender

There is a common misunderstanding about having a driver's license. For many it is seen as a right, but from the state's point of view holding a license is a privilege that comes with responsibility. This privilege can be withdrawn when an offence is recorded. Whilst magistrates sympathise with the financial hardship that can result from having a interlock



device imposed they also have a responsibility to protect the community from risk taking behaviours.

Losing a license due to a drink driving offence is a breach of trust. In the past, magistrates had a difficult task when determining whether to restore a license or not. Interlocks have made it possible for an individual's license to be reinstated with a certain level of confidence. An interlock device collects information which is provided to the court as evidence that one can be trusted to separate drinking from driving. The report generated at the end of an interlock condition period provides the magistrate with a snapshot of an individual's drinking pattern, drinking behaviour and how this will impact on their driving.

Blame the drinking, not the device

It has been my experience that all too often, individuals who have been ordered to continue on with an interlock device on their vehicle do not make changes to their drinking pattern or drinking behaviour, even after having completed drink drive education program. This is usually because their underlying motive for completing an education program has been solely to regain their license- without taking responsibility for the behaviour that lead them to undertake the course in the first place- and they have failed to apply the principles taught in the program to their own lives. There are still others who under report their drinking levels, or the frequency of their drinking and come unstuck when their interlock report contradicts what they have told their assessor.

Identifying the risks

According to research presented by psychologist Dr John Marsden, [Do I drink too much?](#) There are three types of drinkers:

- 1. Occasional drinkers**
- 2. Regular drinkers**
- 3. Dependent drinkers**

Whilst all three types of drinkers can incur violations on an interlock device, there is a strong probability that regular and problematic drinkers will continue with a device beyond their initial condition time period. This can be a cause of anger and frustration to many as it may place significant financial hardship on an individual as well as place stress on relationships and could mean opportunities are lost. Often a fist is shaken toward the authority that has imposed the condition rather than the individual taking responsibility for reckless drinking behaviour.

The risks associated with drinking types

Whilst managing an interlock device that has been installed on one's car can become problematic for all who choose to drink, it is even more so for those whose drinking is regular and/or hazardous in nature.



1. Risks associated with regular drinking

The more frequently one drinks, the more one risks committing a violation. Anyone who has undertaken a drink driving program will be aware that **calculating BAC** is a tricky business given the many variables involved. There have been numerous individuals who have diligently followed the general guideline that one standard drink is eliminated per hour, only to find that they have caused a lockout regardless. Oftentimes though, drinkers just don't allow sufficient time to pass before attempting to start their vehicle.

2. Risks associated with hazardous drinking

When I use the term "hazardous", I am using it to describe high levels of alcohol consumption (5 standard drinks or more) on each occasion. Hazardous drinking is a problem for a large number of people. According to the last **National Health Survey** the proportion of Australians who drink at risky levels has increased over a seven year period. The surveys undertaken revealed that there has been a steady rise in hazardous levels of alcohol consumption across all age groups and both genders.

In my experience, individuals who engage in hazardous drinking give little thought to the fact that their drinking behaviour raises the risk of causing violations on their interlock device. A lockout in the morning indicates that high levels of alcohol has been consumed the night before and that the levels of alcohol present in an individual's body are still high. From that morning reading it is possible to determine how much alcohol an individual consumed the night before. A magistrate uses this information to make an assessment as to whether an individual is behaving responsibly when it comes to drinking and driving.

Why morning readings matter

A high blood alcohol reading in the morning can be an indicator of hazardous drinking. If a number of these readings have been recorded it indicates to the magistrate that the individual is not placing a limit on their drinking and that they have not made alternative transport arrangements for the following morning. Hence a drivers license cannot be held responsibly without an interlock device imposed.

Reducing the risks

Australians love to celebrate with alcohol, whatever the occasion. However all too often, no thought is given to the ramifications a big night can have for the following morning. With a bit of planning, trouble can easily be avoided. As I noted earlier, it is a sad fact that many individuals who have recorded multiple violations on the morning following a big night out have already completed a drink driver education program.

Who's counting?

The problem faced by all of us out on a big night out is that it becomes too much of a bother to keep track of exactly how much alcohol one is consuming. It is difficult to remember to count drinks when one is spending a night with "mates" or celebrating a wedding. This is where a bit of planning can save you a lot of trouble. If you are planning a big night out- just as you night plan not to drive yourself home- plan not to drive the



following morning.

The big question- When do I drive ?

When you have not been able to keep an accurate account of how much alcohol you have consumed it is difficult to assess when your BAC will return to zero. The safest option after a big night is to plan to not drive the following morning. And a word of caution if you are a big drinker, I have come across a quite a number of individuals who have recorded a BAC reading well into the afternoon of the next day, some as late as 4.00pm.

If you do intend to drive the morning after a big night then your only option is to limit your intake of alcohol, and/or consume alcohol in the earlier part of the evening. Consuming alcohol earlier in the evening gives your body time to eliminate alcohol from your system, which in turn allows time for blood alcohol readings to fall.

I have assessed numerous individuals who repeatedly commence drinking late in the evening, knowing that they need to be in the car early the following morning for work or other commitments.

Food and other substances that can cause readings

Substances other than alcohol such as mouth wash and certain medications can cause readings on an interlock device. If this happens to you then it is important that you provide a retest within 5-10 minutes of the recorded reading. If your retest reading rapidly reduces within 5 -10 minutes, this supports your claim that your initial reading was not caused by alcohol.

There are many who do not retest for legitimate reasons, for example, 'I just arrived at work and could not wait another 5 minutes' or 'I was locked out just before leaving for work and I could not wait and therefore opted to go by other means.'

Whilst the above are not serious violations, they can be difficult to substantiate to a magistrate.

Finally

Remember, the issue is credibility. You are the person registered with the court, not your brothers, sisters, friends or work mates. Look after your interlock device because you will be held to account should a reading be recorded regardless of whether the reading came from you, or another person driving the vehicle on which the device is installed.

