Pilot study: Probation model with alcohol interlocks

Date of Submission:
July 30th, 2013

Word Count: 2.108
Number of Tables and Figures embedded: 1

Author(s): Mag. Birgit Oburger, Mag. Anita Eichhorn, Dr. Kerstin Runda

Corresponding Author: Mag. Birgit Oburger, KFV (Austrian Road Safety Board), Schleiergasse 18, A – 1100 Wien, Tel: +43(0)577077-1101, Fax: +43(0)577077-1186, E-Mail: birgit.oburger@kfv.at

Additional Authors:
Mag. Anita Eichhorn, KFV (Austrian Road Safety Board), Schleiergasse 18, A – 1100 Wien, Tel: +43(0)577077-1311, Fax: +43(0)577077-1186, E-Mail: anita.eichhorn@kfv.at
Dr. Kerstin Runda, KFV (Austrian Road Safety Board), Schleiergasse 18, A – 1100 Wien, Tel: +43(0)577077-1250, Fax: +43(0)577077-1186, E-Mail: kerstin.runda@kfv.at
In the US and several countries in Europe, alcohol interlocks have been used in DUI (driving under influence)-offender programs in order to support offenders through the period of rehabilitation. The Austrian Road Safety Board (KFV) has started a pilot project for a probation model. In all the pilot projects with alcohol interlocks, the KFV cooperates closely with the BMVIT, the Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology. The goal of the probation model is to reduce the number of drink-driving offences.

The specific goal of the pilot study was to test the process from installation to removal of the device with all its practical aspects and by this conduct a feasibility study. Thirty drivers were driving for 6 months in four different regions of Austria with an alcohol interlock device installed in their cars. The drivers were monitored and supported by mentors that read out the data and had a supervisory session with the drivers. All drivers had committed a DUI-offence within the last four years.

The participants showed a high acceptance of the device, the handling was mostly described as easy. The device was seen as a good alternative to the revocation of the driver’s license and supportive in separating drinking and driving. The continuous support by the mentors was seen as very important and the connection between the read out and the mentoring in order to really understand the data and get support throughout the process of the probation model was confirmed by all participants.
INTRODUCTION

In the US as well as in some countries in Europe (i.e. Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands, Belgium) alcohol interlocks have been used in DUI (driving under influence)-offender programs in order to support DUI-offenders through the period of rehabilitation. Studies have shown that alcohol interlock offender programs reduce the rate of recidivist drivers enormously: In Finland, the rate is usually between 29% - 30%, while the rate for those that participated in the offender program is about 5.7% (VHEMAS, LÖYTTY 2013). Studies in Maryland US have shown similar results: the risk for driving under the influence of alcohol is reduced by 36% (RAUCH, AHLIN, ZADOR, HOWARD & DUNCAN 2011 cited by NICKEL, SCHUBERT 2012).

However, an EU project consortium shows that the effect of the alcohol interlock diminishes after completing the program (BAX, KÄRI, EVERS, BERNHOFT & MATHIJSSEN 2001 as cited by NICKEL, SCHUBERT 2012). The project consortium therefore recommends enhancing the program by adding psychological and educative measures (NICKEL, SCHUBER 2012). Also, VOAS (2010) shows that

- DUI-offenders are “two and a half times more likely than the average driver to be the drinking driver in a fatal crash” and that
- “the need for counseling assistance is likely to increase the role of court treatment programs” (VOAS 2010).

In Austria, educative and psychological measures for DUI offenders have been offered since 1977 and are compulsory since 1997 (KALTENEGGER 2004). Psychological screenings are already taking place since 1967 (KALTENEGGER, KOLLER 2003).

Based on the studies mentioned above and the good experiences with the educative measures in the past, the Austrian Road Safety Board has started a pilot project for a probation model with alcohol interlocks. Concerning pilot projects with alcohol interlocks, the KFV cooperates closely with the BMVIT, the Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology.

GOALS OF THE PROBATION MODEL

The overall goal of the probation model is the reduction of drink-driving offences. A survey by the Austrian Road Safety Board (KFV) shows that 32% of all drivers that have committed an offence followed by the revocation of the driver’s license continue driving despite the fact that their license has been revoked. The majority does not only make use of a car occasionally but on a regular basis (more than 3 times during the revocation period). Of this group, 38% also continue to drive under the influence of alcohol. When looking further into the reasons for the revocations, it becomes clear that 91% of those who drive under the influence of alcohol despite the fact that their license has already been revoked had the license revoked due to a DUI-offence. In a 10-year-projection with approximately 4.5 million drivers in Austria, this results in 41,000 DUI-offenders continuing driving under influence despite the fact that their license is revoked.

An alcohol interlock program could prevent these drivers from using their car under the influence of alcohol during the probation phase by shortening or replacing the revocation period. In addition, the program has to aim for a long term change in behavior. Therefore, the probation model has to offer special support for high risk and recidivistic drivers. This is done through regular supervision by a mentor who provides consulting,
support and mediation. The probation model has to be a completion of the proven system including administrative penalties, psychological screenings and awareness raising courses. It is not supposed to substitute for either of them.

THE PILOT STUDY

The goal of the pilot study was to test the process from installation to removal of the device with all its practical aspects and hence to conduct a feasibility study. Thirty drivers were driving for 6 months in four different regions of Austria (Vienna, Lower Austria, Carinthia, Styria) with an alcohol interlock device installed in their cars. The drivers were monitored and supported by mentors that read out the data and had a supervisory session with the drivers. All drivers had committed a DUI-offence within the last four years.

FIGURE 1 Project activities KFV 2013.

RESULTS

Read Out Data

During the test period, 17,512 initial tests were recorded. Of these, 158 were above the limit of 0.1 mg/l and lead to a blocking of the vehicle. In addition, 12,408 retests were conducted, of which just 13 were above the limit of 0.1 mg/l. This means that only 0.9% of all initial tests and 0.1% of all retests were above the limit. It can be concluded that the presence of the device itself already prevented the participants from trying to start the vehicle under the influence of alcohol.

Participants' Feedback

During the conversations with the mentors, the following feedback was provided by the participants: The participants showed a high acceptance of the device. The handling was mostly described as easy. There were a few technical problems, especially in the adaption phase. Gradually, less technical issues were named and almost all of them could be resolved during the project phase.

Exemplary statements:

“No problem, you get used to it“

“The longer you use it, the easier it gets”

Retests and the short restarting period (3 minutes) were occasionally described as annoying by the drivers. In general, the handling was not a problem for the drivers. When explaining the need for retests and the short restarting period (control for not having someone else start the vehicle for a driver who potentially is under the influence of alcohol) the necessity was understood but did of course not change the minds of the participants regarding the aspect of perceived annoyance.
Exemplary statements:

“The restarting period of three minutes is too short – 5-7 minutes would be more appropriate “
“Takes long time to warm up in winter”
“It works well, the retests are annoying and distract from driving; who wants to do this?”

The response from friends and family relating to the installed device was described as mainly positive, interested and curious.

Exemplary statements:

“It became a routine for them in the same way as for me.”
“The wife is thrilled, because she knows it is good for her husband“.
“Positive reactions; curious: how does it work? May I try?”

In 65 out of 98 times the topic came up, the participants agreed that the alcohol interlock program would be a good alternative to the revocation of the drivers licence.

Exemplary statements:

“Of course”.
“Definitely.”
“Yes, because it can be necessary to secure existence”.

The topic of the device supporting the separation of drinking and driving came up 88 times, only 11 times a participant mentioned that the alcohol interlock would not support this separation.

Exemplary statements:

“Yes, because the car simply cannot be started”.
“Yes, even the beer at lunch is not consumed anymore.”

All participants (30) stated that the mentor’s support was very helpful and that it was of high importance to them to review and discuss the read out data together with the mentor in order to understand what the device is recording.

Exemplary statements:

“The read out data was explained very well”.
“The mentor was competent and very friendly”
“The response to all my questions and proposals was very responsive.”

**Mentors’ Feedback**

The mentors confirmed a high interest of the participants in the project and especially in the read out data details. They also mentioned that the participants were mostly on time, the schedule for the read outs was working out fine. The read out software also was described as easy to handle, technical support was needed from time to time – both for the devices as well as for the software. The mentors also pointed out that on-site parking as well as rooms for reviewing the read out data right afterwards is necessary.
SUMMARY & OUTLOOK

The project reconfirmed the easy handling of the devices and the data readout. The adjustable settings of the devices were seen as well programmable according to the needs and specifics of eventual legal requirements (i.e. programming of retests). Especially the support provided by the mentor was seen as very important by the participants. The combination of the device and a mentor who guides the participant through the time of the probation was reconfirmed as a successful and fruitful concept. The probation model has proven itself to be a state of the art completion to the existing educative and psychological measures that already exist in Austria today.
ACKNOLEDGEMENTS

The KFV would like to thank the BMVIT – Austrian Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology for partly financing the project and for the close cooperation throughout our work.

REFERENCES


