

MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED: 7.00pm AEDT, Sunday 8 November 2015

Threat of brief jail stay persuades repeat drink drivers and domestic violence offenders to stay sober

A radical program that requires people arrested for an alcohol-related offence to stay sober or receive an immediate brief jail term is helping to reduce repeat drink driving and domestic violence, according to research being presented at the Australasian Professional Society on Alcohol and other Drugs (AP SAD) Conference in Perth tomorrow (Monday 9 November).

Researchers from the RAND Corporation, which is headquartered in the US and recently opened an office in Canberra, found that South Dakota's [24/7 Sobriety Program](#) has led to a 12 per cent reduction in repeat drink driver arrests and a 9 per cent reduction in domestic violence arrests at the county level.

24/7 Sobriety requires repeat drink drivers and other alcohol-related offenders to submit to a breathalyser test twice a day or wear a continuous alcohol monitoring device. Those testing positive to alcohol or missing a test face an immediate jail term of one or two nights.

RAND Senior Policy Researcher Professor Beau Kilmer said that the program takes an innovative approach to tackling repeat drink driving by separating offenders from their drinking rather than their vehicles.

“Traditional punishments aim to prevent repeat drink drivers from driving, through licence loss or suspension, or alcohol interlocks, whereas 24/7 Sobriety seeks to prevent offenders from drinking, in effect suspending their ‘licence to drink’,” said Professor Kilmer.

According to Professor Kilmer, 24/7 Sobriety is successful in reducing heavy drinking and associated crime because it creates a credible deterrent threat that is swift, certain, fair, and known in advance.

Professor Kilmer said that since 24/7 Sobriety began in South Dakota in 2005 more than 30,000 alcohol-involved offenders have been through the program, accumulating more than 5 million days without an alcohol violation.

“Most impressively, about half of the participants never skip or fail a test, and more than 99 per cent of the scheduled breathalyser tests are taken and passed,” said Professor Kilmer.

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Professor Kilmer said that although millions of problem drinkers pass through the US criminal justice system each year, reducing their alcohol consumption has proven difficult.

“24/7 Sobriety is getting some of the most problematic drinkers in South Dakota to sharply cut back on their alcohol consumption. Even if most individuals stay in the program for less than six months, 24/7 Sobriety is having a noticeable effect on public health and safety in the state,” Professor Kilmer said.

Similar monitoring systems have now been adopted by North Dakota and Montana and other jurisdictions are running or planning pilot programs.

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