

Ignition Interlock Bill Filed

With the nationwide holiday DUI crackdown under way, two U.S. senators join Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) in a move to force states to require alcohol ignition interlocks for all convicted drunk driving offenders or lose federal highway funds.

Withholding federal highway money, the method used to make 0.08 blood-alcohol content the law of the land, soon may be used to compel states to require alcohol ignition interlocks for all convicted drunk driving offenders. History shows the threat of losing federal highway funds is a powerful inducement to enact a safety change, and two U.S. senators, Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey and Tom Udall of New Mexico, joined MADD representatives Monday to announce their bill will use this tactic for ignition interlocks.

Lautenberg wrote the law that lowered the legal blood-alcohol limit to 0.08 from 0.10 in all 50 states and also the law that set 21 as the legal minimum drinking age. He said language has been included to accomplish the bill's goal in the transportation reauthorization bill.

"New Mexico was the first to implement an aggressive ignition interlock penalty program for all offenders," Udall said. "The strategy has helped take drunk drivers off the roads and save lives. I believe enacting it nationwide would have the same positive and resounding effect."

It is believed that 50 to 75 percent of drunk drivers continue to drive on a suspended license . With an ignition interlock, DUI offenders can still go to work, school, or anywhere else they need to go. They just can't drive drunk.

Alcohol ignition interlock devices are about the size of a cell phone. They're attached to the starting circuit of a vehicle. A driver must blow into the device, which prevents the vehicle from starting if the driver has measurable alcohol (set to a predetermined level) in his or her system.

Ten states currently have laws that require an ignition interlock for all drunk driving offenders- Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Hawaii, Louisiana, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Utah, and Washington.

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