

Lawmakers consider DUI breathalyzer bill

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By Karina Rusk

State lawmakers took up a bill today to crack down on first-time drunk driving offenders -- it would install breathalyzers in their cars.

A recent study says the move would save lives and money, but at least one group opposes it.

Victor Figueroa installs Smart Start interlock devices in cars.

One long exhale and the car will either start or not. It all depends on how much the driver has had to drink.

"If you are at a non passing level then it locks you out of your vehicle and you're not allowed to start it," said Victor Figueroa from DVS Kustoms.

A bill making its way through the state assembly would dramatically increase the number of people who would be required to have interlock devices in their cars.

"What the legislation is proposing now, is that every person who is convicted of a DUI be required to put on the interlock ignition devise," said ABC7 legal analyst Dean Johnson.

That means, first time offenders with a blood alcohol level of point .08 would face the same requirement as repeat offenders with a blood alcohol level of .20.

On Thursday the American Beverage Institute denounced the proposed legislation. The institute does favor using the device on repeat offenders and those driving with high alcohol levels.

"You wouldn't punish someone driving five miles over the speed limit the same way would someone driving 25 miles over the speed limit and that's what we think this bill does," said Sarah Longwell from the American Beverage Institute.

There are four states that require interlock devices for first time offenders.

In New Mexico, alcohol related fatalities dropped 11 percent in just one year after it adopted the change.

California legislators tried last year to pass a similar bill also aimed at the first time offender.

"We have the ability to put a police officer in the front seat of every single car in California," said Assemblyman Todd Spitzer (R) Orange on February 14, 2007.

The California Highway Patrol and Mothers Against Drunk Driving are sponsoring this latest effort to expand the use of in car breathalyzer. Lawmakers will begin debating the bill in committee next month.

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