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► [The 24/7 Sobriety Project.](#)

Long L.
Unpublished.

An account from the its originator of the genesis, working and impressive impacts of South Dakota's 24/7 Sobriety project; rather than treating repeat drink-driving offenders, the project enforces abstinence via frequent testing and the threat of immediate brief imprisonment.

Original abstract The usual message to drunk drivers is, "if you don't quit drinking and driving, we will make you quit driving." Enforcement efforts are geared to keeping drunk drivers off the road. This is done through license suspensions or revocation, and incarceration for repeat violations. Due to inadequate supervision, probation is reliant on the offender's cooperation, and many continue to drive illegally and are held to account only when they are re-arrested. The system is simply not designed to address the underlying problem of alcohol and illegal drug dependence or addiction. In contrast, the message of [South Dakota's 24/7 Sobriety programme](#) to drunk drivers is, "If you don't quit drinking and driving, we will make you quit drinking." Although not a substitute for drug and alcohol treatment, the project attacks alcohol dependence and addiction in a new and more direct way.

At the request of the project, judges imposed a special set of bond conditions on the target group. The conditions were:

- defendants must completely abstain from the consumption of alcohol;
- defendants must report to a test site (typically the sheriff's office) every morning and every evening at 7am/pm and submit to a test of breath, blood or other bodily substance for the consumption of alcohol.


Defendants who tested positive were immediately incarcerated for violating the bond condition. Bench warrants were issued for defendants who failed to report to the test site on time. All defendants who violated a bond condition were incarcerated for 24 hours before making a court appearance where the same conditions were imposed. In counties lacking the personnel to test twice a day, defendants were issued SCRAM (Secure

Continuance Remote Alcohol Monitoring) bracelets to monitor their alcohol and drug use.

The pilot programme testers saw that regular testing and accountability could keep chronic drink driving defendants sober for months at a time. But they also saw that some defendants were using marijuana, cocaine or methamphetamine as a substitute for alcohol. This prompted the implementation of a urinalysis testing programme to randomly test for illegal drugs. The next challenge was to extend drug testing to rural areas lacking the personnel to administer tests. The simple answer was a sweat patch. Once judges in pilot counties saw the effectiveness of the programme on chronic drunk drivers, they decided to extend it to defendants arrested for non-driving alcohol-related offenses.

By December 2006, the pilot project had processed over 1000 drink driving defendants. Two-thirds tested for an average of 111 days were 100% compliant. At present, over 1800 defendants are tested each day and nearly 11,000 defendants have been tested to date. More than 99% of participating defendants report on time and test clean. The 24/7 Sobriety Project has demonstrated short-term success. Hundreds of participants who had been drinking for decades now enjoy sobriety.

There are other encouraging signs. South Dakota lost 191 people in traffic fatalities in 2006. In 2007, the traffic death toll dropped to 146 and in 2008 to 121. In 2006, 67 South Dakotans died in alcohol-impaired auto crashes. That number dropped to 45 in 2007 and to 25 in 2008. The expansion of the 24/7 Sobriety project was identified as one of several reasons for these declines. The project started in response to South Dakota's increasing prison population. Between 1996 and 2006 the prison population grew by an average of 152 a year. In 2007, the population decreased by 50 and in 2008 by another 34. South Dakota's Secretary of Corrections identified the 24/7 Sobriety project as part of the reason for these decreases.

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