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▶ South Dakota 24/7 Sobriety program evaluation findings report.

**Loudenburg R., Drube G., Leonardson G.
Mountain Plains Evaluation, LLC, 2010.**



Drink-driving offenders on South Dakota's 24/7 Sobriety project test alcohol-free at over 99% of the twice-daily breath tests intended to enforce abstinence via the threat of immediate brief imprisonment, and subsequent recidivism is lower than among other drink-driving offenders in the state.

The [South Dakota 24/7 Sobriety programme](#) sought to tackle repeat drink-driving in a new and more direct way with the message, "If you don't quit drinking and driving, we will make you quit drinking." Judges impose a special set of bond conditions on repeat drink-driving arrestees requiring them to submit to twice-daily (7–9am and 7–9pm) alcohol testing as a condition of bail or to wear an alcohol-detecting anklet. Evidence of drinking or a missed test constitute a violation of bond, parole or probation requirements, which may be immediately revoked. In many cases the infraction will result in immediate 24-hour imprisonment; missed tests lead to an arrest warrant.

The data included in the featured evaluation of the scheme derived from the project's web-based management information system which records substance use test results, plus official records on offenders which permits an assessment of recidivism compared to drink-driving offenders not sentenced to 24/7 Sobriety.

This data shows very promising results. Of almost 820,000 recorded twice-daily alcohol breath tests on 24/7 participants from 2005 to early 2010, just 0.06% were recorded as failures. Almost 55% of the 4009 24/7 Sobriety programme participants in the sample did not fail a test, and only 9% had more than three failures during a testing period, which for each averaged about 120 days. Recidivism among the same sample was consistently lower than among South Dakota drink-driving offenders not subject to the programme, suggesting that it had a sustained impact on repeat drink-driving offending after programme completion. Notably, 14% of two-time offenders not on the programme committed another drink-driving offence within three years, but only 7% of 24/7 Sobriety participants, a statistically significant difference.

A closer comparison was made between 24/7 Sobriety drink-driving participants with at least 30 or 90 consecutive days tests (respectively 1660 and 456 of all 4009 participants) and non--participant offenders matched on aspects of criminal history, gender, age and month of arrest. In both sets of offenders over 84% had not been rearrested for a drink-driving offence for at least three years but in the 30-day testing sample this figure was 4% greater among the 24/7 Sobriety participants, and among the 90-day testing sample, 9% greater. In both cases there was a statistically significant difference in time to arrest.

Although additional data is needed, these initial findings show the programme is very successful in promoting drink-driving offender sobriety while individuals are on the programme. Initial findings also demonstrate that 24/7 Sobriety participants tested twice a day have lower recidivism rates when compared to individuals who do not participate in 24/7 Sobriety. For repeat offenders, even minimal days of participation in the programme reduces recidivism rates and individuals with at least 30 days participation demonstrate a greater reduction. These reductions far exceed the rates reported in the literature for traditional approaches to drink-driving offenders, including education and sanctions. Initial findings also demonstrate that unlike traditional use of alcohol ignition interlock devices to prevent offenders driving after drinking, the 24/7 Sobriety programme has a sustained effect on recidivism rates. Small sample sizes are the major obstacle to drawing further statistical conclusions.

FINDINGS COMMENTARY These results largely reflected the strategy of requiring offenders to attend (normally at law enforcement premises) twice daily to be tested for drinking, a procedure which may well entail much more quasi-therapeutic and/or deterrent contact than anonymous testing on its own. Across all participants, findings of lower recidivism than among other drink-driving offenders were based on a comparison which apart from the offender having to live in the state, made no attempt to ensure like was being compared with like. It means the results are vulnerable to differences between offenders or circumstances for whom courts considered 24/7 a suitable option which the offender was prepared to accept, and situations in which this option was not offered or was rejected. These differences may have contributed to the results, regardless of whether offenders were sentenced to the programme.

The comparison with more closely matched sets of non-programme offenders would suffer from the same vulnerability, but presumably to a lesser degree. However, sub-sampling 24/7 Sobriety participants to select only the minority with consecutive tests for 30 or 90 days introduces another possible source of bias, because no equivalent selection could be made from among comparison offenders. As a result, none of the comparisons with other offenders can be considered a decisive vindication of the programme.

Nevertheless, results among 24/7 Sobriety programme offenders were on the face of it impressive, at least while subject to the constraints imposed by the courts, and the programme [is thought](#) to have contributed to reduced alcohol-related traffic accident deaths and a declining prison population.

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