

On the wagon

*In light of the Corporate Manslaughter Bill, **David Whittock**, Managing Director of Alcolock GB Ltd, advocates the fitting of ignition locks as the way forward in transport health and safety...*

The alcolock's full title is Breath Alcohol Ignition Interlock Device. In Northern America, it tends to be called an interlock while, in Europe, we refer to it as an alcolock, but it is principally the same device, one that requires a driver to take a breath test before the ignition of their vehicle can be switched on.

For some time, the alcolock has been in extensive use in Northern America and Australia. Closer to home, Sweden has implemented alcolocks not only as a punitive measure for offenders, but more widely as a drink driving deterrent in fleet transport and public service vehicles. The Swedish Government is now drafting legislation to have all new buses and trucks fitted with alcolocks by 2010, and all new cars fitted with alcolocks by 2012. But what is the situation in the UK?

In 2004, trials of alcolock programmes with drink drive offenders were launched in Birmingham and Bristol and, although the results are yet to be released, the 2006 Road Safety Act has already incorporated a section legitimising the use of alcolocks. "Drink driving is a problem that needs a multiple solution", says Robert Gifford of PACTS. "We need new ways of dealing with the habitual offender and the alcolock is one such option."

However, as demonstrated in Sweden, the alcolock has a preventative use, as well as a punitive one, and there is currently another piece of UK legislation in the pipeline, which may bring the alcolock into far greater usage.

The Corporate Manslaughter Bill could become law as early as April this year and, when it does, it will require organisations to have comprehensive road safety policies and procedures in place. The majority of us realise that drink driving is the cause of far too many accidents (560 deaths and 2,500 serious injuries a year, which is the equivalent of a 7/7 underground bomb every month). We are also becoming aware of the danger of the 'morning after' effect, which is especially applicable to fleet transport operators. If an organisation implements alcolocks to combat these incidents, it is demonstrating utmost precaution to keep its employees, and its clients, safe on the road. It is a sure sign not only of corporate responsibility, but also of quality assurance.



"You can have an alcohol policy", says David Freeman, who is the UK representative of the CENELEC (European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardisation) task force for developing European standards for alcolocks. "But you can never be absolutely certain it is being followed. Having an alcolock in the vehicle is a simple and cost-effective way of being certain."

Of course, there are some concerns about fitting alcolocks. Predominantly, these worries surround the reactions of both employees and clients. Is it practical? Will it get in the way of the driver's duties? What impression will it give? Recent research conducted by the European Commission on the feasibility of alcolocks has found that they not only proved practical and easy to use but, when utilised on buses, were greeted positively by passengers.

With the use of alcolocks becoming more and more widespread, fitting an alcolock would seem to be one of the simpler ways of ensuring your organisation's safety on the road. In fact, it may even be simpler than remembering the alcolock's full title.



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