

# Opinion: Advocating for ignition interlocks for convicted drunken drivers

By Nancy White

WASHINGTON -- As Americans prepare for holiday celebrations, AAA reminds drivers and passengers alike of the dangers on the roads this New Year's Day, which consistently ranks as the year's deadliest day for alcohol-related fatalities.

To strengthen efforts to protect the public against drunken drivers and reduce alcohol-related traffic deaths, AAA is announcing its support of ignition interlocks for all convicted DUI offenders, and offers important safety advice to partygoers.

"AAA is not alone in its concern about impaired driving or strong support for tough policies for convicted drunk drivers," said AAA Traffic Safety Advocacy Director Jake Nelson.

According to the 2012 Traffic Safety Culture Index conducted by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, more than nine in 10 drivers consider it a serious threat to their personal safety when others drink and drive, and nearly all (97 percent) surveyed find it unacceptable for a driver to get behind the wheel when they have had too much to drink. To prevent these dangers, nearly eight in 10 Americans support requiring ignition interlocks for all convicted DUI offenders, even if it's their first conviction.

Research has identified ignition interlock devices as a proven way to save lives. AAA's recommendation to require the use of IIDs for all convicted offenders is grounded in research.

“Evidence clearly shows that IIDs are more effective than other methods at reducing re-arrest among convicted drunk drivers and keeping them off the road,” said Nelson.

AAA is reaching out to motorists on the heels of a recent National Transportation Safety Board decision to support laws requiring IID use for all first-time DUI offenders – one of several new recommendations issued to help curb alcohol-related traffic injury and death.

“I commend AAA for stepping up for safety,” said NTSB Chairman Deborah Hersman. “Technologies, such as ignition interlocks, will reduce alcohol-related crashes on our nation’s roadways. We look forward to working alongside AAA and its clubs to eliminate the nation’s top killer on our roadways – impaired driving.”

Preventing drinking and driving is a shared responsibility to save lives. While AAA advocates expanding IID use to all persons convicted of drunken driving, New Year’s Eve partygoers can do their part by heeding the following advice:

Always plan ahead to designate a non-drinking driver before any party or celebration begins;

Never get behind the wheel of a car when you’ve been drinking alcohol – even after just one drink;

Never ride as a passenger in a car driven by someone who has been drinking alcohol – even after just one drink;

Do not hesitate to take the keys from friends or family members who may be impaired;

Call a taxi for a friend in need;

Be a responsible host in reminding guests to stay safe and always offer alcohol-free beverages;

If you encounter an impaired driver on the road, keep a safe

distance and ask a passenger to call 911 (or pull over to a safe location to make the call yourself)

Remember: prescription, over-the-counter medications and illegal drugs also can impair your ability to drive safely.

*Nancy White works for AAA.*