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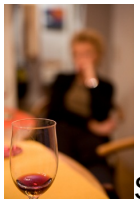
NATIONAL COUNCIL ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG DEPENDENCE, INC.

Alcohol Detecting Technology Could Save 10,000 A Year From Drunk-Driving Death



Scientists outside Boston are developing a technology that could bring drunk driving to a halt.

The federal government and the 16 major automobile makers are funding QinetiQ North America's $10 million Driver Alcohol Detection System for Safety (DADSS) project.

"This is the single best opportunity we have to prevent 10,000 people from dying a year — the equivalent of the seat belt of our generation," project leader Bud Zaouck told CBS This Morning.

The breath-based approach, called distant spectrometry, would detect the alcohol on a driver's breath before allowing that person to operate the car.

The researchers have narrowed down the solution to two technologies – one breath-based, the other touch-based – that evaluate a person's blood alcohol content.

Both approaches will require the driver to pass a sobriety test before starting a vehicle. One is a sensor mounted close to the steering wheel that assesses whether the driver's breath is above the U.S. legal limit of 0.08.

The other is a start and stop button that will gauge each driver's alcohol level with infrared light sent into the fingertip. The sensor will also detect whether someone from the passenger seat is leaning over to press the button, Zaouck said.

The touch-based approach, called tissue spectrometry, would estimate a driver's alcohol level when he or she presses the vehicle's start-stop button.

The American Beverage Institute (ABI), however, strongly opposes placing alcohol detectors in all cars. The institute, which represents more than 8,000 U.S. restaurants, claims to be worried that even if the technology is accurate over 99.9 percent of the time, it could still result in preventing thousands of sober drivers from operating their vehicles.

"DADSS supporters claim the alcohol detectors would be voluntary and set at 0.08," said Sarah Longwell, managing director of ABI, "but there is a growing mountain of evidence showing that their true goal is to put alcohol-sensing technology in all cars as original equipment, set well below the 0.08 level."

The DADSS project started in 2008 but the organization says that the technology will not be implemented for about eight to 10 years.

Source: By Michael Walsh / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS.

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