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New Technology Aims to Prevent Drunk Driving

Cars and trucks one day may have built-in blood alcohol detectors, The Wall Street Journal reports. Research on the Driver Alcohol Detection System for Safety (DADSS) is progressing more quickly than expected, and could be available within eight to 10 years, experts say.

The technology could be built into a vehicle's dashboard or controls. It would check a driver's blood alcohol level, and would not start if the level were above the legal limit. Researchers developing the system are working with the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

The next goal would be to develop a commercially produced vehicle that could drive a drunk owner home, the article notes.

About one-third of drivers killed in car crashes have blood alcohol levels of 0.08 or higher, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

Devices called alcohol interlocks are already available to disable a car if the driver is intoxicated. They are primarily used for people who have been caught with blood alcohol levels above the legal limit. About 16 states require people convicted of drunk driving to install these devices in their vehicles. Drivers must blow into a tube to verify they are sober before they can start the car.

The new technology being developed would not require blowing into a tube. It could be embedded in a starter button or shift lever.

A proposed federal transportation bill would give the NHTSA's alcohol detector program $24 million over two years. The funding would allow the agency to equip 100 or more cars with prototypes of the new alcohol detection devices. One device would measure alcohol in the driver's breath, while the other would take a reading from the driver's skin.