Interlocks Are Effective for Low-BAC First Offenders in NM
Richard Roth  September 30, 2011

The first figure shows that interlocks are effective at reducing the re-arrest rate of low-BAC (<0.16%) first offenders. The second figure shows that low-BAC first offenders are much more likely to be re-arrested than those with no priors are to be arrested. The third figure shows that first offenders are the largest fraction of those arrested for drunk driving.

There are 1,400,000 licensed drivers in NM and 272,000 of them have been arrested at least once for DWI. That leaves 1,228,000 drivers who have never been arrested for DWI. In 2010, 7891 NM drivers were arrested for the first time for DWI. So the arrest rate of those without priors is 7891/1,228,000 = 0.64% per year or 1.9% per 3 years. By comparison the number of low-BAC First Offenders without interlocks who are re-arrested within 3 years is 16.4% as shown in the next figure. It is clear that low BAC first offenders without interlocks are much more likely to drive drunk than the general public.
First Offenders comprise the largest fraction of all DWI offenders as shown in the figure below. Moreover NHTSA’s Fatal Accident Reporting System reveals that 91% of Alcohol-Impaired Driving Fatalities are caused by a First Offender defined as no prior convictions in previous 3 years.  

Finally, the alcohol industry would have us believe that low-BAC means little impairment. The fact is that the low-BAC range (0.08% to 0.16%) represents the equivalent of 3 to 6 beers or ½ to a full bottle of wine consumed by a 150# person in the hour before driving. That’s enough to significantly impair most people. It is not as the industry would have us believe, a glass of wine with dinner. The industry knows that exempting low-BAC first offenders from our most effective and cost-effective sanction would allow most convicted drunk drivers to continue to drink and drive.

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1. [http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/810616.PDF](http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/810616.PDF) pg 5. Only 9% of drivers in fatal crashes with a BAC >0.08 had a prior DWI conviction in the previous 3 years.