



# Traffic Tech

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## The Use of Sobriety Checkpoints for Impaired Driving Enforcement

Impaired driving and impaired-related crashes constitute one of the nation's leading health problems. These events result in more deaths each year than do total homicides. The impact is particularly severe among young people, age 15-24, where impaired driving is the leading cause of death. Clearly, impaired driving and impaired related crashes constitute a major threat to the safety and well-being of the public. The costs resulting from alcohol-related crashes should be recognized and weighed against the costs and inconveniences associated with efforts to reduce them.

The purpose of sobriety checkpoints is to maximize the deterrent effect and increase the perception of "risk of apprehension" of motorists who might operate a vehicle while impaired by alcohol or other drugs. There is convincing evidence that the use of checkpoints has a marked, dramatic effect on reducing alcohol-related crashes in a community. A recent United States Supreme Court decision has upheld the use of sobriety checkpoints to detect and apprehend impaired drivers. In response to requests from the law enforcement community, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has published updated information regarding the use of sobriety checkpoints in a document titled "The Use of Sobriety Checkpoints for Impaired Driving Enforcement" dated October 1990. This document is available from NHTSA, Police Traffic Services Division (NTS-41), 400 7th Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20590. This information provides law enforcement agencies with a uniform and successful method to plan, operate and evaluate sobriety checkpoints.

The publication contains four main elements: Guidelines; Briefing Guide; Motorist Survey Questionnaire; and, Suggested Model Policy

### GUIDELINES

These guidelines suggest and describe operational considerations that police administrators should consider in order to ensure sobriety checkpoints are used legally, effectively and safely. These points are consistent with those specified in recent court decisions, including the United States Supreme Court ruling in Michigan Department of State Police v. Sitz. The guidelines consist of the following components:

- Ongoing Program to Deter Impaired Driving
- Judicial Support
- Existing Departmental Policy
- Site Selection
- Special Warning Devices
- Visible Police Authority
- Chemical Testing Logistics
- Contingency Planning
- Detection and Investigation Techniques
- Operational Briefings
- Comprehensive Public Information and Public Education Programs
- Data Collection and Evaluation

## **BRIEFING GUIDE**

Prior to conducting a sobriety checkpoint, specific items should be discussed and thoroughly explained to all personnel participating in the detail. The briefing guide is designed to cover the necessary elements for a legal, effective and safe sobriety checkpoint.

## **MOTORIST SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE**

Measuring the reaction of the public to sobriety checkpoints is necessary for a successful public information and education program to combat impaired driving. A short questionnaire given to drivers stopped at the checkpoint can provide these data. Suggested questions are provided for use.

## **MODEL POLICY**

A model policy was developed by a committee of state, county and municipal law enforcement officers from across the country. The policy provides guidelines for the physical construction and operation of sobriety checkpoints. It was designed for adoption and implementation by individual departments to ensure standardization of sobriety checkpoints.

NHTSA strongly supports the regular use of sobriety checkpoints. Sobriety checkpoints should be integrated into an overall drunk and drugged driving enforcement program, along with vigorous selective enforcement, public information and education. Effective enforcement of drunk and drugged driving laws, combined with swift and sure license removal, provides the most important element for reducing alcohol-related fatal and serious injury crashes. Checkpoints are an important part of a total enforcement program designed to raise the perceived probability among potential impaired drivers that they will be stopped and arrested for DWI.

For additional information about this project, contact: Police Traffic Services Division, NTS-41, TSP, NHTSA, 400 7th Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20590