

Sobriety Checkpoints

Sobriety Checkpoint Quick Facts

1. Vehicles are stopped in a specific sequence such as every other vehicle or every fourth, fifth or sixth vehicle.
2. Checkpoints are typically publicized in advance and signs are posted at the approaches to the checkpoints warning drivers that a checkpoint is ahead.
3. Police must have a reason to believe the driver stopped at a checkpoint has been drinking before a breath test can be conducted.
4. If the checkpoints are conducted properly, cars are pulled over at random according to their order in the sequence which diminishes the possibility of racial profiling.
5. Law-abiding people are sent on their way within minutes.
6. Average stop time is about the length of a cycle at a stop light.
7. The primary goal of a sobriety checkpoint is not to arrest people, but rather to deter people from committing DUI.
8. Sobriety checkpoints help stop drunk drivers who would likely remain under the radar.
9. The publicity from checkpoints reminds people who drink that drinking and driving don't mix.
10. Research shows that for every dollar invested in checkpoints, communities save between \$6 and \$23 in costs from alcohol-related crashes.
11. The annual cost of alcohol-related crashes to society is over \$130 billion.
12. Research shows that checkpoints, if done correctly, can be effective with as few as three to five officers.

High Visibility Drunk Driving Crackdowns

MADD supports twice-yearly drunk driving crackdowns and heightened law enforcement before high-risk periods – Labor Day and the December holidays.

Saturation Patrols and Sobriety Checkpoints

A saturation patrol is a concentrated enforcement effort that targets impaired drivers by observing moving violations such as reckless driving, speeding and aggressive driving among others things.

A saturation patrol is generally spread over a larger geographic area than a sobriety checkpoint.

Sobriety checkpoints are a technique where law enforcement officials evaluate drivers for signs of alcohol or drug impairment at specific points on the roadway.

Q&A on Sobriety Checkpoints

What are sobriety checkpoints?

Sobriety checkpoints are a law enforcement technique where law enforcement officials evaluate drivers for signs of alcohol or drug impairment. Vehicles are stopped in a specific sequence (e.g., every other vehicle or every fourth vehicle).

Is that legal/constitutional?

The Supreme Court ruled in *Michigan v. Sitz* that sobriety checkpoints are constitutional because the small inconvenience that drivers face is overwhelmed by a compelling state interest in saving lives.

How effective are sobriety checkpoints?

Right now, only one arrest is made for every 88 episodes of driving over the illegal limit. Thus, having concentrated enforcement can help apprehend drunk drivers and deter those who hear about the checkpoints from driving under the influence. The Centers for Disease Control studied sobriety checkpoints and found numerous studies that show they can reduce alcohol-related crashes and fatalities by 18-24 percent.

Won't this cost state and local governments a lot of money?

Actually, there are significant cost savings from high-visibility enforcement. In addition, most sobriety checkpoints are preformed through the use of federal grant dollars aimed at preventing drunk driving. One study found that there was an average cost savings of \$50,000 per checkpoint, including over \$3,000 in medical costs. Others have found that checkpoints save between six and 23 dollars for every dollar invested. The annual cost of drunk driving related crashes to society is over \$130 billion.

Don't saturation patrols, or roving patrols, get more arrests than sobriety checkpoints?

Sobriety checkpoints have a higher visibility and raise the perceived risk of getting caught more than do roving patrols or saturation patrols. This means they deter more people from committing the crime of drunk driving and thus save more lives. Sobriety checkpoints have a strong deterrent effect, which means that they may yield **fewer** arrests because they are doing what they are supposed to do – **prevent** people from committing the crime in the first place. Sobriety checkpoints are similar to a security checkpoint at the airport--they are done for the safety of everyone and they don't take much time.

Won't checkpoints cause a backlash against law enforcement?

A 2010 Study published in the *USA Today* by Center for Excellence in Rural Safety at the University of Minnesota showed 82% approval for sobriety checkpoints. Studies have found 90 percent approval ratings for sobriety checkpoints after checkpoints have begun, meaning that support won't trail off – it will grow.

What is the difference between saturation patrols, sobriety checkpoints and roving patrols?

- ▶ Sobriety checkpoint: law enforcement evaluates drivers for signs of alcohol or drug impairment at certain points on the roadway. Vehicles are stopped in a specific sequence, such as every other vehicle or every fourth, fifth or sixth vehicle. Sobriety checkpoints must

display warning signs to motorists. Police must have a reason to believe the driver stopped at a checkpoint has been drinking before a breath test can be conducted.

▶ Saturation patrol: concentrated enforcement effort that targets impaired drivers by observing moving violations such as reckless driving, speeding, aggressive driving, and others. A saturation patrol is generally spread over a larger geographic area than a sobriety checkpoint.

▶ Roving patrol: an enforcement effort that targets impaired drivers by observing moving violations such as reckless driving, speeding, aggressive driving, and others. Not necessarily enhanced.

Aren't roving patrols/saturation patrols more targeted and successful at catching the higher-risk drivers with BAC's twice the illegal limit of .08? Checkpoints are stationary and drunks find their way around them.

The point of a checkpoint is to deter primarily and to enforce the law when required. Sobriety checkpoints are higher visibility and raise the perceived risk of getting caught more than do roving patrols or saturation patrols. This means they deter more people from committing the crime of drunk driving and thus save more lives.

Don't checkpoints target social drinkers?

No. Checkpoints target the general population... anyone driving. If someone is driving impaired, law enforcement will test them and enforce the law. If someone is not driving impaired and has not broken any laws, their stop will be minimal and they will be on their way. Checkpoints reduce alcohol-related traffic crashes when they are frequent, and highly publicized. They deter people from driving impaired.

What States Currently Prohibit Sobriety Checkpoints?

- Idaho
- Iowa
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Oregon
- Rhode Island
- Texas
- Washington
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming
- Alaska and Montana choose not to conduct sobriety checkpoints.

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