



NEWS RELEASE

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Sweden first EU country to mandate alcohol interlocks?

Swedish Minister for Communications and Regional Development, Ulrica Messing, spoke to MEPs today in Brussels about the successful introduction of a device to prevent drink driving on Swedish roads. This device is an alcohol interlock which works as a breath-testing device connected to the vehicle. It will not allow the driver to start the engine, unless the required breath test has produced a positive result⁽¹⁾.

The Swedish parliament is currently investigating the possibility of requiring by law alcohol interlocks in all new trucks and buses from 2010, and in all new cars from 2012. *"We have to push this issue together with the EU,"* Minister Messing said. *"Without the cooperation of the EU, it will not be possible for Sweden to introduce a national requirement for cars to be fitted with alcohol interlocks. I want Sweden to be granted an exemption by the Commission to be able to push the issue forward,"* she added.

The European Transport Safety Council⁽²⁾ (ETSC) supports this initiative of the Swedish government. At present about 30-40% of all driver fatalities and 25% of all driver injuries in Europe are caused by drivers who are over the legal drink driving limit⁽³⁾. Jörg Beckmann, ETSC's Executive Director, stated that: *"Alcohol interlocks must form an important part of preventing alcohol-related road deaths across Europe, in addition to strengthened police enforcement. Sweden should go ahead in introducing alcohol interlocks to all vehicles. This device will stamp out drink driving and its use should be extended to the whole of the EU as soon as possible."*

More and more countries in Europe use alcohol interlocks as part of driver rehabilitation programmes. Studies have shown that their use can lead to 40-95% reductions in repeat drink driving offences⁽⁴⁾. In Sweden, these devices are also applied by commercial transport providers who have equipped at least 10,000 company cars. The EU is financing research including field trials in a further four countries.

At today's seminar, Swedish industry representatives underlined the importance of cooperation between business and government. Industry started developing alcohol interlocks for private use even without there being any real customer demand yet: *"We have come to an agreement with our government,"* a representative stated. *"They told us that 'if you develop the technology, we will create the demand'. Today, demand is actually ahead of the technical development."*

Swedish Member of the European Parliament and ETSC board member, Ewa Hedkvist Petersen, also supports the initiative of her Minister of Transport. *"Alcohol interlocks have already shown to be successful in their use with repeat offenders and commercial drivers in Sweden. The time is here to extend their use to all vehicles in order to prevent further drink driving fatalities and contribute to the EU target of halving road deaths by 2010."*

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Notes to Editors:

(1) ETSC (2005): In-car Enforcement Technologies Today

(2) The European Transport Safety Council (ETSC) is a Brussels-based non-profit making organisation dedicated to the reduction of transport crashes and casualties in Europe. ETSC seeks to identify and promote effective measures on the basis of international scientific research and best practice. It brings together 29 international and national organisations concerned with transport safety from across Europe.

(3) ETSC (2003): Cost Effective EU Transport Safety Measures

(4) Drevet M. (2001) Alcohol Interlock Implementation in the European Union an In-Depth Qualitative Field Trial