



Criminal Justice Knowledge Bank

An initiative of the Division of Criminal Justice Services



Albany County: Ignition Interlock Device Enforcement Demonstration Project

Practitioner:

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Summary:

Albany's Ignition Interlock Device Enforcement Demonstration Project implements a series of enforcement initiatives targeting convicted DWI drivers who operate vehicles without ignition interlock devices.

Problem

From August 2010 through March 2017, New York State courts ordered more than 115,000 individuals convicted of driving while intoxicated (DWI) to install ignition interlock devices under Leandra's Law. These individuals also had a condition on their license prohibiting them from driving a vehicle without an interlock device. Within the first four months of being sentenced, however, only 27 percent of individuals installed the devices; another 13 percent did so later in their sentence, after their driving privileges were restored. Individuals who did not install the devices successfully argued to their sentencing judge that they no longer owned or would operate a vehicle. Some of these individuals continued to drive, using vehicles without ignition interlock devices as required. The number of individuals arrested for driving without a court-ordered device quadrupled from 2011 to 2016, when 3,726 arrests were made.

Program Description

The Ignition Interlock Device Enforcement Demonstration Project provided training and small grants to counties (three each in 2016 and 2017) that enabled probation, police and prosecutors in each to design enforcement initiatives targeting convicted drunk drivers who break the law by operating vehicles without ignition interlock devices or by circumventing or tampering with the devices so they are inoperable. The project was also designed to foster already strong partnerships among police, probation, conditional discharge monitors and prosecutors to hold individuals who break the law accountable for their behavior.

County agencies participated in training to review changes in New York's DWI laws, and requirements of individuals convicted of DWI. Participants received quick reference (pocket) cards that detail offenses related to the installation and operation of ignition interlock devices, including tips for investigating and charging such offenses.

An initiative of the state Division of Criminal Justice Services, the Knowledge Bank features summaries of promising local programs and practices and provides a platform for criminal justice practitioners to identify potential approaches to address their community's specific public safety issue.

Following the training, Albany County implemented and led a four-part enforcement effort:

- Probation, in conjunction with local police, monitored offenders for compliance with the conditions of their probation as they arrived for their required reporting dates. Probation surveilled 94 probationers on 14 different reporting dates, resulting in seven violations of probation and four arrests.
- Local police partnered with Probation to conduct home visits and surveillance on probationers and conditional discharge cases, resulting in four arrests.
- Albany County conducted multi-agency DWI checkpoints at five locations, selected based on their proximity to community events that served alcohol. The checkpoints resulted in 10 arrests.
- Police and Probation monitored individuals convicted of drunk driving as they arrived at two court-mandated DWI Victim Impact Panels and made five arrests.

Funding

The Division of Criminal Justice Services supported the demonstration project with grant funding.

Relevant Partnerships

The demonstration project required law enforcement agencies within the county to work together. Counties were selected to participate based, in part, on existing strong partnerships within the county. The following agencies participated in Albany County: the Probation Department, Sheriff's Office, District Attorney's Office, and the Guiderland and Colonie police departments.

Critical Success Factors

Training allowed professionals from participating agencies to better understand recent changes to DWI/ignition interlock laws and how some offenders circumvent them. The project also promoted regular inter-agency communication among participating agencies; this unified front is critical to helping ensure that offenders comply with DWI laws.

Lessons Learned

In some instances, family or household members were unaware that ignition interlock device requirements applied to their vehicle if someone they lived with was convicted of DWI. During the course of the demonstration project, Albany County distributed informational materials to these households explaining how these requirements affected them. The goal of educating all vehicle owners in the household about ignition interlock device requirements was to decrease the likelihood that vehicles would be available to DWI offenders inclined to drive despite consequences.

Additional Comments

Regional trainings for Ignition Interlock Device Enforcement took place in Broome, Erie, Suffolk, Warren and Westchester counties in 2018, and Otsego, St. Lawrence, and Allegany counties, and New York City in 2019. In addition, Dutchess, Oneida, Onondaga, Ontario and Orange counties, also operated demonstration projects and can be contacted for more information.

Submit a Program to the Knowledge Bank

Has your agency implemented a program or practice that has addressed a public safety issue?

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