



NATURAL HABITAT



Portable meter warns drinkers of one too many

By Steve Hoyt
Of the Emerald

With Oregon's new, more strict drunken driving laws now in force, deciding whether to drive after drinking could be a difficult decision.

There's a new product on the market that may make this decision easier — the No-Drive Meter.

The No-Drive Meter is basically a portable, disposable breathalyzer. The device is constructed of a 4-inch glass tube with three yellow rings, a plastic mouthpiece and a red balloon.

To use the device, a person blows into the balloon, then attaches it to either end of the tube. After 60 seconds, the number of yellow rings that turn green will indicate the alcohol content of the person's blood. One green ring warns drinkers "to be cautious," two rings means "no drive," and three says "please no drive."

A breathalyzer that is usable by the general public is not a new idea. Many Oregon bars have coin-operated breathalyzer machines that tell the user if he or she is too drunk to drive.

Daniel Moore, of the Eugene Police Department's Crime Prevention Unit, is not familiar with the No-Drive Meter but knows about this type of product. Moore says that portable, citizen-use breathalyzers are OK but are not extremely accurate methods of determining whether a person is legally sober enough to drive.

Moore says he would not recommend use of portable breathalyzers because they give drinkers "a false sense of security." An inexperienced drinker, a tired person, or someone who is using a decongestant may take less alcohol to become drunk, he says. In these cases, the product would incorrectly tell the user that it was safe to drive, Moore says.

A more effective and safer way to deal with drinking and driving, he says, is to have one person in the group not drink at all — a "designated driver."

Moore notes that a breathalyzer is not the only way to get a rough idea as to whether a person has had too much to drink. One ounce of 80-proof distilled liquor, a 12-ounce bottle of beer, and a 4-ounce glass of wine each represent a .02 percent blood/alcohol level in the body.

Four such drinks in one hour give a person a blood/alcohol level of .08 percent — making him or her legally drunk under Oregon law. The body burns off approximately one drink per hour.

The No-Drive Meter costs \$1.95 and is available at many drug and department stores.



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