



WE CAN END IMPAIRED DRIVING WITH TECHNOLOGY

By Stacey D. Stewart

Every 39 minutes, a life is cut short by impaired driving. That's 37 lives lost each day—more than 10,000 lives a year. Since 2019, the number of deaths caused by drunk driving has increased by a staggering 33%. These aren't just numbers. They are mothers, fathers, siblings, and friends whose absence leaves an irreplaceable void in the lives of their loved ones. For more than four decades, Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) has championed the fight against impaired driving, and now, through innovation and technology, we stand on the brink of a breakthrough that can end this public health crisis once and for all.

The HALT Drunk Driving Act, passed in November 2021, represents a transformative step toward a future where impaired driving fatalities no longer exist. This groundbreaking law mandates the development and integration of anti-drunk driving technology in all new vehicles. Once implemented, it has the potential to save more than 10,000 lives annually and prevent hundreds of thousands of injuries, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

This isn't a distant dream; it's an achievable reality within our grasp.

A New Era of Auto Safety

The anti-drunk driving technology required by the HALT Drunk Driving Act is a game-changer, much like seatbelts, airbags, and backup cameras were in their time. These technologies, now standard in every vehicle, revolutionized auto safety by preventing countless injuries and deaths. Anti-drunk driving technology is the next frontier.

Unlike ignition interlock devices or police breathalyzers, this smart technology operates seamlessly, integrated into the car itself.

Using advanced sensors, these systems detect if the person behind the wheel is impaired. They are designed to prevent or limit vehicle operation when impairment is detected, ensuring the driver—and everyone else on the road—stays safe.

This proactive approach is a critical evolution. Rather than waiting for a crash to occur, this technology prevents impaired driving before it happens. It's an innovative, forward-thinking solution that underscores the transformative power of technology in addressing society's most pressing challenges.

The Path to Implementation

The HALT Drunk Driving Act tasks the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) with developing a national safety standard for this technology through a rigorous rulemaking process. This process brings together auto manufacturers, safety experts, engineers, and public voices to ensure the selected solutions are effective, practical, and equitable.

Similar collaborations brought us other life-saving innovations like airbags and automatic emergency braking. The stakes couldn't be higher—every moment of delay costs lives. MADD urges the USDOT to expedite this process and set the safety standard immediately.

American support for this initiative is overwhelmingly positive. According to a study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, nearly two-thirds of respondents strongly support the mandate for vehicle impairment prevention technology.

Furthermore, polls conducted by Ipsos for MADD show that nine out of ten Americans believe this technology is a good or very good idea. This widespread public endorsement highlights a collective recognition of the urgent need to address impaired driving with lifesaving technology.

A Vision for a Safer Tomorrow

The HALT Drunk Driving Act, legislation that became law through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, is a bold declaration that we have the power to eliminate drunk driving. By leveraging cutting-edge technology, we can ensure that no family has to endure the pain of losing a loved one to an impaired driver.

Yet, technology alone isn't the answer. Until these systems are fully implemented in vehicles, MADD will continue its critical efforts by advocating for change, educating the public, and building a diverse network to amplify our life-saving message. We will champion prevention efforts in schools, support law enforcement initiatives, and advocate for policies that prioritize public safety.

But the ultimate goal—a future free from impaired driving—requires all of us. It demands a societal commitment to innovation and action. It calls on policymakers to prioritize this life-saving technology and on the auto industry to embrace its responsibility to protect drivers and passengers. It asks every individual to recognize the profound impact that implementation of this law will have on their communities.

A Legacy of Hope

Imagine a world where impaired driving no longer casts a shadow over our celebrations, our commutes, or our lives. A world where families can gather for holidays without the fear of losing a loved one to a preventable crash, and where sobriety checkpoints become a thing of the past because the technology itself ensures no one drives impaired. That world is within reach. Just as seatbelts, airbags, and backup cameras transformed automotive safety, anti-drunk driving technology will redefine what it means to protect lives on the road.

At MADD, we believe that every life is worth saving and that the future of road safety is bright. Together, with determination and innovation, we can make impaired driving a thing of the past. The question isn't whether we can end drunk driving—it's whether we're willing to act with the urgency and resolve this crisis demands.

Let us rise to the challenge and embrace the promise of a safer tomorrow. Lives are at stake, and the time for action is now. Stacey D. Stewart is the CEO of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD).



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