

High Schools Increase Student Safety with Breath Alcohol Testing

By: Nicola Grun

Lifeloc
TECHNOLOGIES

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Calcasieu Parish High School, Louisiana and Beaverton High School District, Oregon use new breathalyzer technology from Lifeloc Technologies to eliminate alcohol abuse at school events and save lives.

Allen Cormier, Sergeant with Calcasieu Parish Sheriff's Department in Louisiana knows first-hand that lives are saved by conducting breath alcohol testing at school events. Says Sergeant Cormier, "Prior to testing for alcohol at school events at least one child died each year from alcohol related incidents. This statistic has since been eliminated." The sentiment is echoed by Kevin Sutherland speaking about the Beaverton District High Schools in Oregon. Kevin observed that prior to implementing comprehensive alcohol awareness and testing programs at the five schools, six to 10 teenagers died each year in alcohol related crashes. Since Beaverton District implemented testing three years ago there have been three deaths and five injuries from similar crashes.

Houston, We Have a Problem

Allen Cormier and Kevin Sutherland are Police Officers who have witnessed first-hand the life-saving power of school breath alcohol testing. Every year the alcohol related fatality rate among young drivers increases during Prom season. In some years the April, May and June time period accounts for as many as 40% of all underage alcohol related traffic deaths. Across the nation twenty five percent of youth aged twelve to twenty years old drink alcohol and 16% reported binge drinking.¹ In 2010 there were approximately 189,000 emergency room visits by those under age twenty one for injuries and other conditions linked to alcohol in the United States.² In addition underage alcohol use is linked to Drug and tobacco use, risky sexual behavior, academic failure, and alterations in the developing brain and fetal alcohol syndrome.³

Breath Alcohol Testing at the Beaverton District

The Beaverton School District is the third largest in Oregon and works in collaboration with the *SKID Program* (Stop Kids Impaired Driving) to educate high school students about the dangers of drinking and driving. Students watch graphic videos involving wrecked vehicles and injured victims. At the program's start six to ten teenagers died each year in alcohol related crashes, however in recent years there have only been three deaths and five injuries from similar crashes.



The FC5 is designed for automatic and manual zero tolerance alcohol screening. In automatic mode the subject blows onto the collector cone and the test triggers automatically. A POS (alcohol detected) or NEG (no alcohol) result appears almost instantly, making it suitable for screening high numbers of students entering events. In manual mode the FC5 can test ambient air or open drink containers.

Prior to testing students with Lifeloc breath testers, School Resource Officers would conduct field sobriety tests (FST) to determine if students were under the influence of alcohol at school events. In performing an FST, officers request suspects to perform intuitive activities like following an object with their eyes, reciting the alphabet, walking a straight line and standing on one leg. One issue with the FST is that subjects can fail this test even though they may not be under the influence of alcohol. The bigger issue is the time it takes to conduct the test. By comparison, field sobriety tests average three minutes per student and allow for human error while the Lifeloc Breathalyzer responds virtually instantly.

Today Officers use Lifeloc's *FC5 Hornet* to rapidly screen approximately 200 students prior to event entry. Students must provide consent to be tested at school dances and sporting events, but can be declined entry if they do not consent. The *FC5 Hornet* is a zero tolerance alcohol screener that can test people, ambient air and open drink containers.

The Calcasieu Success Story

Allen Cormier, Sergeant with Calcasieu Parish Sheriff's Department, Louisiana purchased six Lifeloc *FC10* breathalyzers in 2012. "We were getting a lot of incidences happening at schools during prom, homecoming and different high school dances," stated the Calcasieu Parish Public Schools' Administrator. Now event tickets include a warning to students and parents that alcohol testing may be conducted. "We've actually tested more than 450 students within 30 minutes," says Allen, "and because everyone now knows that we have the capability of testing the warning is backed up." Since the majority of students want to attend now they show up sober.

Students found to be under the influence are sent home and the parent(s) notified. Calcasieu typically passes the responsibility for subsequent disciplinary action to the parents. "This is an important point," said Chelsea Johnson, Lifeloc Schools Specialist. "Schools are not attempting to prevent kids from drinking alcohol. That is the parent's responsibility. By testing, schools are ensuring a safer and more enjoyable school event for all."

Summary

Breath alcohol testing at High School events is a proven deterrent to illegal underage drinking. While Breathalyzer use can be controversial reducing alcohol related accidents and fatalities should never be. For more information on implementing breath alcohol screening please contact Lifeloc at sales@lifeloc.com or call 303.931.9500.



Calcasieu Parish uses the Lifeloc *FC10* breathalyzer. The *FC10* combines two testing modes into one device. In "passive" mode students are rapidly screened for the presence of any amount of alcohol in their system. Calcasieu Parish saves \$1,400 in mouthpiece costs annually by using passive mode. Students identified with alcohol in their system can be "direct" tested using a mouthpiece to get their actual BAC (Breath Alcohol Content) level.

References

1. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Results from the 2011 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Summary of National Findings
2. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. The DAWN Report: Highlights of the 2010 Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) Findings on Drug-Related Emergency Department Visits
3. The Surgeon General's Call to Action To Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking 2007. http://www.camy.org/factsheets/sheets/alcohol_advertising_promotion/Call_To_Action.pdf

