

Breathalyser blitz

2019-04-09 15:30

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The Witness



Provincial traffic inspectors Tamsanqa Shasha (left) and Nozipho Langa demonstrate how the Evidential Breathalyser Alcohol Testing (EBAT) machine works at the Alcohol Evidence Centre in Braid Street on Monday. (Ian Carbutt)

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If you think you can only be found guilty of drunk driving through a blood test, think again.

The use of the Evidential Breathalyser Alcohol Testing (EBAT) machine is now in full force and was officially launched on Monday in Pietermaritzburg.

It was part of the national and provincial Transport departments' 2019 Easter road safety campaign.

The device takes into account gender and age, and prints the results on thermal paper which lasts seven years. It was given the go-ahead by the Directorate of Public Prosecutions in March.

Thirty-eight people were arrested over the weekend for driving under the influence of alcohol following testing with the new device.

Transport Minister Blade Nzimande said at the launch that there were many legislative and administrative challenges that had to be overcome for the machine to be used. One of them was ensuring the presence of nurses during roadblocks where alcohol testing is being done.

Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo said he is confident that the new machine will see fewer hospital admissions and deaths due to road crashes caused by drunk driving.

He said the machine issues the blood-alcohol results immediately, "eliminating the need for a blood sample to be sent for analysis by a district surgeon, which could take up to six months due to backlogs".



Provincial traffic inspectors Tamsanqa Shasha (left) and Nozipho Langa demonstrate how the Evidential Breathalyser Alcohol Testing (EBAT) machine works at the Alcohol Evidence Centre in Braid Street on Monday.

On Monday, the Alcohol Evidence Centre (AEC), was also officially opened, in partnership with South African Breweries. The centre is equipped with all the necessary equipment required by law enforcement officials to accurately and efficiently determine the breath alcohol level of a person suspected of driving under the influence of liquor.

Statistics for last year showed KZN had the most road deaths in SA, with 267 crashes and 328 deaths.

Senior director of corporate affairs of SAB, Zoleka Lisa, said that the establishment of the centre is part of the company's road safety focus, aimed at reducing harm caused by the misuse of alcohol. "We are committed to making a real and positive impact on society and to do as much as possible to help change behaviour.

"Lower blood alcohol concentration limits and stricter enforcement have been proven around the world to reduce the number of accidents and fatalities linked to drinking and driving. South Africans must realise that if you are going to drink, you cannot drive," she said.

She said that these centres were first implemented across the country in 2011, and have proven to be successful and led to an increase in convictions.

At the launch Nzimande also said that one of the other ways the department was trying to decrease road accidents was to ensure that drivers are skilled. A project is being piloted by the department along with the Transport Education Training Authority in the Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga, North West, and Limpopo provinces where the department is assisting pupils to obtain their driver's licences.

Nzimande also said that the Administrative Adjudication of Road Traffic Offences (AARTO) Amendment Bill has been passed by Parliament and is ready to be signed into law by President Cyril Ramaphosa.

Through the AARTO Amendment Bill, the Points Demerit System will be implemented. "This system will allow us to identify, rehabilitate and ultimately eliminate habitual offenders found on our road transport network," he said.

During question time at the function, Teboho Mthombeni of the National Metrology Institute of South Africa (NMISA) said that a new version of the breathalyser machine will be built that aims to detect if a driver is under the influence of narcotics.