

Intoxication Tests Help Keep Roads Safe

Indiana University



Indiana University Professor Rolla Hager, M.D., introduced the Drunkometer in 1938, marking the beginning of a long, fruitful relationship between the university and the fight against drunk driving. Patented in 1936, the Drunkometer was the first practical test to measure intoxication levels and involved subjects breathing into a balloon. Hager, then chairman of the Indiana University School of Medicine's department of biochemistry and toxicology, invented the device to combat the growing dangers of drinking and driving.

The Drunkometer led to the creation of the modern Breathalyzer in 1954 by Robert F. Borkenstein, a professor at Indiana University's department of forensic studies. Later licensed to Smith and Wesson, the Breathalyzer measured blood alcohol content while adding a portability lacking in the Drunkometer, which needed to be recalibrated when moved.

“ As the Breathalyzer and other tests for intoxication have become commonplace in law
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enforcement, alcohol-related driving fatalities have decreased steadily. Deaths caused by drunk driving have dropped more than 36 percent since 1982 in the United States, indicating progress is being made keeping the nation's roads safer and more sober.

The Drunkometer also led directly to the establishment of the Indiana University Research and Technology Corporation (IURTC) in 1996. The IURTC is a not-for-profit organization designed to assist in the process of bringing technology and innovations from university researchers into the public sphere. University administrators and faculty began supervising patent and licensing procedures with Hager's invention, forming the beginnings of what would become the IURTC.

The IURTC's mission is to not only enhance the research and development capabilities of the university but also to support economic development in Indiana and the rest of the United States.

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