

Lawmakers Explore Speed Control As Alternative For Reckless Drivers



by Ben Szalinski

Illinois drivers who have their license suspended for speeding or reckless driving violations could have an alternative under legislation being considered in the Statehouse.

Rep. Marti Deuter, D-Elmhurst, is pushing a bill that would allow drivers to have a speed control device installed in their car rather than having their license suspended.

"Speeding is a chronic problem on our streets and is a threat to public safety," Deuter told a House committee last month. "Speeding is a factor in nearly half of all deadly crashes. Risk of fatality increases as speed increases."

Under House Bill 4948, drivers who have their license suspended following two infractions within 12 months for either reckless driving or speeding 26 mph or more over the speed limit would qualify to apply for a permit with the secretary of state's office to join the program. If approved, they'd have to pay a \$30 monthly fee to have the device installed in their car. Drivers would be required to use the device for one year after their first suspension, two years after their second suspension and three years after three or more suspensions.

Participants would still be subject to some prohibitions, however, such as driving a commercial vehicle or school bus.

"We know that the primary penalty for extreme or repeat speeders, which is license suspension or revocation, doesn't work," Deuter said. "Data indicates that about 75% of the people whose licenses are suspended continue to drive."

The bill was approved unanimously by the committee but is still being negotiated before getting a full vote in the chamber.

How the device works

The device is programmed to know the road's speed limit and prevents the vehicle from driving any faster than it, no matter how hard the driver presses the gas pedal. It's similar to ignition interlock devices that people convicted of drunk driving must blow in to start their car. Drivers that shut the devices off or tamper with them could be charged with a Class A misdemeanor.

Mike Mahana, vice president of LifeSafer, a company that provides interlock and speed control devices, said the program allows people to continue their daily routines. He said the devices also come with an override button that can allow dri-

vers to temporarily go faster if needed.

"It is configurable to let them go for a certain period of seconds over the speed limit," Mahana told Capitol News Illinois. "We control that by how many miles per hour they go over the speed limit and for how long they can use it for. It's meant for people that need to pass a vehicle, maybe go up a hill, passing a truck."

Rep. Will Guzzardi, D-Chicago, was among the lawmakers who participated in LifeSafer's demonstration of the technology outside the Statehouse on Wednesday.

"It feels very natural and it also feels really safe," Guzzardi told Capitol News Illinois. "You as a driver, you don't notice it after a couple of minutes. You're driving normally."

Guzzardi said that once he hit the 30 mph speed limit on Springfield's streets, he didn't notice any difference in how the car handled.

"I think this really reinforced for me that this technology works and it's safe and it's easy," he said. "If we can make drivers safer on the road and help them avoid collateral consequences involving the criminal justice system, I think that's a win."

Virginia, Washington, and Washington, D.C., are the only jurisdictions that have the program, according to the National Conference of State Legislators.

Three Sheets in The Wind . . . by Mary

Are you afraid of storms?

In my very, very young impressionable years, I followed in the footsteps of the most wonderful, smart, funny person I knew, my grandmother. She was afraid of storms. Unlike my aunt, who used the storm mantra "if it's going to get you, it's going to get you," grandma didn't really talk about being afraid. She lived it with her hands knotted in her lap, sitting forward in her chair, ever alert.

Apparently, my mom and dad were too busy to be afraid. They watched the sky, sometimes with coffee cup in hand, standing outside, looking up at the clouds. Our house had a terrific basement and a storm cellar, so, I guess, mom and dad were confident. They made sure my grandma, and anyone who was visiting with her, made it to the security of our basement. Grandma would sit and worry and I would ask any adult near by, "are we safe?"

As the years passed and grandma, too, passed, I kind of outgrew the afraid part of storms. Every spring, with every crack of thunder, the "tornado that went through Lacon" is a topic of discussion and reminiscing. It was said the storm parted the Illinois River exposing, for seconds, the muddy river bottom. The sky was green, and it

sounded like a huge freight train passing through. The aftermath of that storm changed Lacon. Homes were destroyed. Properties were damaged, and sorrowfully, lives were lost. Scary talk.

Now, many, if not most or all, of the survivors of that horrific storm are gone. The first person accounts are only second person or hearsay stories, interesting asides.

I asked if you are afraid of storms. I used to be, but I'm not afraid like I was as a child. However, during some of the storms we have had in recent years, I was scared. During the storms last week, I took up a post on my porch, with the window open, rocking in my chair. I listened, watched, and with everyone who was tuned to the news, I waited. It was a strange night. No cars went by my porch. No one was out dog walking. The wind came up, then died down, then started again at the top of the big old trees lining the street. Then it rained.

As I have mentioned several times, I am not the news junkie I used to be. The news is not the news exactly, but a repetition of the disagreements in our world and in our country. I'm sick of the news, the same old stuff I can't fix. On the

other hand, last week's local news kept our area up to date with the local weather storm reports. I watched the maps and listened to the explanations of the areas on alert for possible tornado action. The channel we tuned to stayed up to date with all the warnings in the area.

What a difference a few years, a lot of science and plenty of great minds make. All those years ago, the weather was an important part of the news. At best, it might announce that storms were on the way. There was no up to date coverage just reports of the damage after the fact. As much as we might fight it and long for the past, this change is a good thing. It's a lot more accurate than my reports from the porch.

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