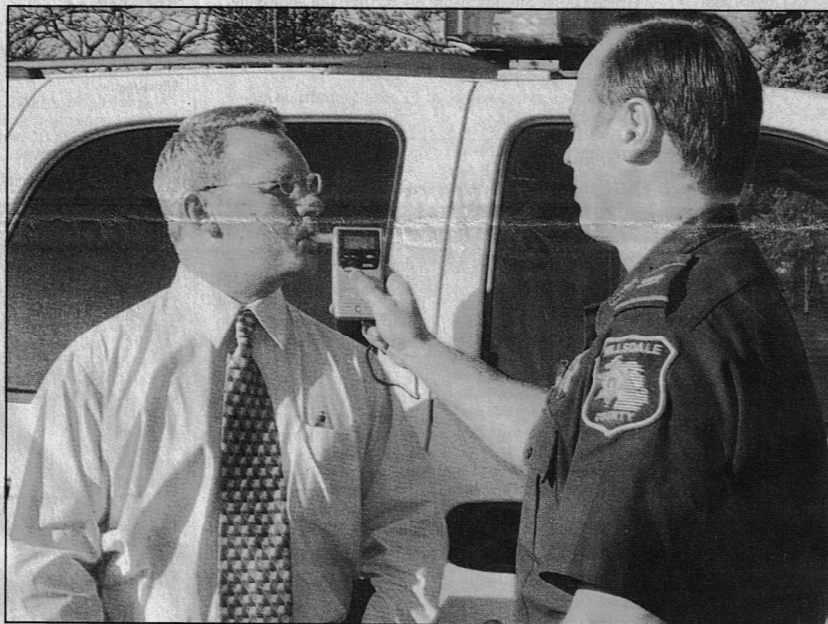


# DRIVING DRUNK HAS HIGH TAB



Hillsdale County Sheriff Department Capt. Carl Albright demonstrates how a breathalyzer test is administered with Detective Sgt. Mark Hodshire Tuesday. An arrest for driving drunk can cost the driver thousands of dollars in costs and fines.

First-timers can expect to take a \$4,000 hit plus possible jail time

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If you're planning on drinking and driving this New Year's Eve, be prepared to pay the cost.

While people often talk of the physical dangers of drunken driving, the financial repercussions are also quite painful.

In addition to the nearly \$800 spent on court costs and fees, people convicted of drunken driving can expect to pay thousands of dollars more in additional expenses including jail fees, towing expenses, state assessments, higher insurance premiums and more, adding up to more than \$4,000.

"It does not pay to drive drunk," Hillsdale County Undersheriff Jeremiah Hodshire said. "Not only because you're putting the public in danger, (but) there's a financial cost."

Michigan defines drunk driving as having a 0.08 or higher blood alcohol content, often determined by a breathalyzer test.

Hillsdale County District Judge Donald Sanderson said first-time offenders with a BAC between 0.1-0.15 can expect to pay approximately \$745 in court costs, receive six points on their license, attend a four-hour highway safety program, and have their license suspended for six months.

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PHOTO ILLUSTRATION / ERICA HOBBS

| NAME   | 00123          |
|--|----------------|
| <b>"Average" drunk driver*</b>   |                |
| 1. • Fine:   | \$150          |
| 2. • Court costs:  | \$300          |
| 3. • Probation oversight cost:   | \$100          |
| 4. • Law enforcement reimbursement:  | \$100          |
| 5. • Crime Victim's Fund State assessment:   | \$50           |
| 6. • State Justice Fund assessment:  | \$45           |
| 7. • Driver responsibility: per yr. for 2 yrs.   | \$1,000        |
| 8. • One night in jail:  | \$30           |
| 9. • Jail booking fee:   | \$15           |
| 10. • Bond: (10%)  | \$100          |
| 11. • Car impounding fee:  | \$75           |
| 12. • Car towing fee: avg. @\$3.50/mile  | \$20           |
| 13. • Storage fee for one day:   | \$20           |
| 14. • Substance abuse evaluation:  | \$60           |
| 15. • Increase of insurance premium:   | \$2,000        |
| 16. • License reinstatement fee:   | \$125          |
| 17. • Highway safety program:  | \$85           |
| 18. *Driver is a first-time offender over the age of 21. Does not have a minor in the car or a history of accidents. |                |
| 19.  |                |
| 20.  |                |
| <b>TOTAL</b>   | <b>\$4,275</b> |

"Very few people come back for a second or third time. They just can't afford it"

Hillsdale County District Court Judge Donald Sanderson



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"(This would be for) a first offense with no (prior) accidents, of legal age," he said. "Any of those factors would change the amount that's due."

While there is often no jail time for a first-time offender (excluding the night spent in jail after being arrested for drunken driving), Sanderson said the court can put someone in jail for up to 93 days for a first offense.

At \$30 a day to stay in jail, the cost adds up quickly.

Drunken drivers must also beware of the fines imposed by the state itself.

A first-time offender can expect to pay the driver responsibility fee of at least \$500 per year for two years for driving while impaired, or the full \$1,000 a year for two years if convicted of the full charge of driving while intoxicated, which attorney Kevin Shirk said is necessary to drive again.

"If you don't pay, you can't drive, (even if) you're making payments," he said.

With the state-mandated six-month license revocation, drunken drivers will have some time to generate the funds.

Those convicted of driving while intoxicated face 30 days of hard suspension, where no driving is allowed, followed by five months of a restricted license where driving is limited to work,

court or medical appointments.

Shirk said the driving restrictions are particularly difficult for Hillsdale County residents who struggle with limited public transportation options to get to work.

"We don't have buses or taxi cabs," he said. "For 30 days, you have to rely on somebody else to get to work."

When drivers do get their licenses back, they can next expect to get hit with higher insurance premiums, often doubling or tripling the cost from before.

If convicted of an alcohol-related offense, individuals will see an average increase of \$2,000 in their insurance premium for five years and will be classified as a high risk driver, Dawn Parker, insurance agent with Farm Bureau Insurance of Jonesville said.

Drivers that are placed in the high risk pool are not eligible for a policy with the agency for three years and therefore have to use a company that will charge dou-

ble the amount of other agencies, she said.

After three years, the driver would no longer be considered high risk and would be eligible for a policy with Farm Bureau but would still be charged an increased premium until the five years is up.

A typical offense will add six points to their insurance and will decrease to three points after three years.

Repeat offenders face even stricter costs.

While second offense driving while intoxicated is still considered a misdemeanor, the driver can face up to one year in jail and even higher costs and fines.

Third-time offenders face a felony charge and a maximum of five years in prison.

Those who injure somebody else are nearly guaranteed prison time.

"Very few people come back a second or third time," Sanderson said. "They just can't afford it anymore."

Staff writer Amy Bell also contributed to this report.

Hillsdale attorney Kevin Shirk