

My View DWI article

What people who get DWIs say.

Dick Roth and Impact DWI have been presenting the Victim Impact Panel to people in Santa Fe County convicted of DWI for the past 15 years. This 2-hour panel includes an information on alcohol and impaired driving; several drunk driving victims sharing their stories. We also ask DWI offenders how the DWI affected their lives. Here's what they tell us.

Cost. "I didn't have the money and had to borrow from my family." "I'm unemployed and don't know where I'll find the money to pay the fines." (The average DWI costs \$4,000, not including the ignition interlock which is another \$1,000 and increased insurance costs over the next 3 years which can run several thousand.)

Time. "I don't have time for anything, but work, sleep, and doing my DWI stuff. I call each morning to see if I have to get a drug test. I went to DWI School three Saturdays. I went to six counseling sessions and six group therapy sessions. I did 24 hours of community service. I got an ignition interlock and blow into it every time I drive. I was assessed for addiction. I went to the Victim Impact Panel."

Embarrassment. "The police treated me like I was a criminal." "I thought my driver's license picture was bad. Now when you google my name, the first thing that appears is my DWI mug shot." "When I got to jail, I couldn't stop crying." "I'm trying to raise my children to do the right thing and now, I've lost their respect." "I feel I've let my family down." "I don't give people rides anymore because they'll see the ignition interlock." "I disappointed my mother." "It is so embarrassing to be watched while you pee for the drug test."

Consequences. "I lost my job and had to take one that pays much less." "I lost my commercial driver's license and my job." "I lost my scholarship." "I never thought I'd get caught."

More consequences. "I wrecked my brand new car." "I lost my arm (individual raised his amputated arm)." "I woke up in jail and couldn't remember what happened except that I'd been drinking. I kept praying I hadn't killed anyone." "My husband divorced me because of it." "It really messed up the custody battle for my kids."

How their DWI happened. "I'd never had a Long Island iced tea before, I didn't know they had so much alcohol. My car slid on the ice and when the police came to help me, they arrested me for DWI." "I didn't know you could get a DWI for drinking in a parked car." "I met the man I'm divorcing to work on the division of property. We had pizza and beer. As I drove away, he called 9-1-1 and I was arrested." "I was at this party and got very angry at this person. I had to get away. I didn't think about how much I'd had to drink." "I'd been unemployed the past year, living in my car. Got a job and celebrated with friends. Got a DWI driving away from the bar, lost my car, and spent 20 days in jail because I couldn't raise bail. I'm living in the shelter now, still looking for a job."

Things to be grateful for. “I’ve stopped drinking.” “I’ve gone back to AA.” “The DWI saved my life.” “I admitted to myself that I’m an alcoholic and I can’t drink.” “I’m addicted to prescription painkillers. Now I’m getting help.” “I was drinking because I was so depressed. Now I’m in therapy, getting better.” “Sometimes the interlock is the only thing that keeps me from driving after I drink.”

Anyone who drinks and drives could be arrested for DWI or hurt someone in a DWI crash. In Santa Fe the average DWI offender age is 42, average education level is 2 years of college. Before their DWI they spent an average of \$30/week on alcohol. Right before their DWI, 30% say they drank in bars/restaurants, the rest at parties, at home, or in the car. Average blood alcohol concentration (BAC) when arrested was 0.16 (twice the per se limit). 25% of arrests occurred after a crash. 10% lost their jobs. 20% believe they are alcoholics, 30% acknowledge they are binge drinkers, and the rest say they are social drinkers.

At the conclusion of the panel we ask: don’t drive after drinking, don’t drink while driving, don’t ride with someone who’s been drinking, don’t drink in a parked car, don’t loan your car to someone whose license is revoked for DWI, and always wear your seatbelt.

Tom Starke is president of Impact DWI, a nonprofit, and Chairman of the Santa Fe County DWI Planning Council.