

El Defensor Chieftain

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Officers 'BACTRACK' on DWI

Portable devices are field tool for officers

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Area law enforcement officers have vowed never to back down on their fight against drinking and driving.

They will, however, BACTRACK after receiving gifts from the Socorro County DWI Compliance office.

Armed with six BACTRACK B70 Breathalyzers, County DWI coordinator Theresa Rosales dispatched the troops to her office to add more firepower to their DWI arsenal.

"These are pretty amazing little machines," Rosales said. "They are accurate to within 0.01 percent on the blood alcohol content scale."

In addition to being accurate, the portable units are fast — requiring just five seconds to register. The machines also provide a range of 0.00 to 0.40.

Despite the fact that this cutting edge technology is not admissible in a court of law, officers say the BACTRACK is an important tool in the ongoing battle to curb drunken drivers.

"They are extremely accurate," New Mexico State Police Sgt. Raul Vigil said. "We field tested one recently that showed a driver had a 0.05 blood alcohol content. We confirmed that finding on our IR8000 machine and it was right on the dot."

Vigil said officers still depend on industry standard field sobriety tests to determine whether or not a motorist has had too much to drink. The portable machines, however, are a great resource.

"It's not concrete, but since we follow our standard protocol, these are just another tool to help us determine whether or not we need to get someone off the road," Vigil said.

Vigil's boss, Capt. Randy Trujillo, said he views the new devices as the final step in field testing.

"A decision to arrest is made only after officers have conducted full field sobriety tests," Trujillo said.

Socorro County Sheriff Chief Deputy Preciliano "Shorty" Vaiza agreed.

"We're just now getting these so we haven't had the benefit of testing them in the field, but we are really looking forward to it," Vaiza said. "Like the state police, we'll look to use our standard field sobriety tests — that is first and foremost — but it looks like these are going to be great tools for all of us."

The machines were purchased using funds from the DWI office's Victim Impact Panel — a mandatory course for DWI offenders that details the "gory" effects of drunken driving, Rosales said. Each offender pays \$40 to attend the VIP.

Of the six BACTRACK machines donated Monday, Feb. 23, two went to the New Mexico State Police, two went to the Sheriff's Department and two went to the Socorro Police Department.