

Alcohol intoxication

When and how to get initial accounts from people who are under the influence of alcohol.

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Alcohol intoxication – guideline

Officers and staff can take an initial account from an intoxicated person.

Evidence summary

The evidence from the 12 experiments reviewed suggested that alcohol intoxication can, but does not always, have a detrimental effect on recall. Overall, experiments testing the effects of blood alcohol concentration (BAC) levels broadly equivalent to the UK drink-drive limit generally found no effect on recall accuracy. Three experiments testing the effects of higher levels of BAC, however, found alcohol had a marginally detrimental effect on recall accuracy in some tests. Evidence suggested that alcohol intoxication can reduce the amount of information recalled, particularly when at higher doses. When testing the impact of delaying taking an account from intoxicated participants by comparing recall accuracy when intoxicated immediately after an event with accuracy after a one-week delay (when sober), two experiments found participants were more accurate when intoxicated rather than sober following a one-week delay.

Practitioners also felt it would be appropriate to take a first account from witnesses who appear intoxicated and to note their own observations regarding the apparent intoxication in their duty statement/pocket notebook/call log.

Empirical evidence

Limited

Practitioner evidence

Available

Accuracy and level of intoxication

Unless a witness is physically unable to provide an initial account, taking an account should not be delayed because of alcohol intoxication as the effect of a delay on accuracy appears to outweigh the effect of intoxication.

Practitioners agreed that they would, as a minimum, take basic details from an apparently intoxicated person. Practitioners suggested that, when taking an initial account from an apparently intoxicated person, it was important to consider:

- whether it would be inappropriate to ask a person to sign anything if they appear intoxicated – the officer could instead document the information in a duty statement or Pocket Notebook (PNB), or consider the use of body-worn video (BWV) if available
- that a person might display apparently intoxicated behaviour but be suffering from a medical or other condition – this also applies over the phone, where a person who sounds intoxicated may in fact be in need of urgent medical attention requiring immediate response

Tags

Evidence-based policing