

'Sobriety tags' rolled out across Wales for criminals with alcohol bans

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*The tags have already been successfully piloted in parts of England.
Credit: ITV Wales*

From today, people in Wales who have been banned from drinking by law can be ordered to wear 'sobriety tags' to monitor their compliance.

Described as "breathalysers for the ankles", the tags monitor the wearer's sweat at 30 minute intervals and will alert the probation service if any alcohol has been consumed.

Someone may have been handed an alcohol abstinence order because of previous criminal behaviour linked to the substance. It is a fairly new power allowing courts to give offenders drinking bans for up to 120 days.

An estimated 39% of violent crime involves offenders who are under the influence of alcohol, and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) believe the social and economic cost of alcohol-related harm is more than £21 billion a year.

Anyone who breaches an alcohol abstinence order can be fined, have the ban extended or even find themselves jailed.

Lucy Frazer MP, who is Minister of State within the MoJ, said that helping people to stay sober can cut down on reoffending.



Probation staff are alerted if the tags are tampered with. The technology can also distinguish between drinks and other types of alcohol, such as hand sanitiser or perfume.

The MoJ, who are behind the tag initiative, said treatment referrals for alcohol abuse will still be made for those with more serious alcohol addictions who commit crimes.

UK Government minister for crime and policing, Kit Malthouse, said: "All too often we see the devastating effects of alcohol-fuelled behaviour, reckless crimes and casual violence which blight our neighbourhoods and the lives of too many victims."

"This proven new tool can break the self-destructive cycle that offenders end up in, helping them sober up if they choose to and the courts to punish those who don't."

Kit Malthouse MP, Minister for Crime and Policing



*The tags are due to be rolled out across England next year.
Credit: ITV Wales*

The scheme has already been successfully piloted in London and across Humberside, Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire. Offenders involved there were alcohol-free on more than 97% of the days they were monitored.

Offenders who wore them also reported a positive impact on their lives, wellbeing and behaviour.

Secretary of State for Wales, Simon Hart, said: "I am encouraged to see Wales at the forefront of implementing this new technology, which we believe will contribute towards lowering reoffending rates, making our streets safer and supporting those who need help."



*Courts in Wales can now sentence individuals with the tags.
Credit: ITV Wales*

Heather Nicholls, the Deputy Head of Service Integration in the National Probation Service in Wales, said that the services hoped it would have a "positive" impact on offenders lives.

"The tag itself is essentially a breathalyser for the ankle, it takes a sample of sweat every 30 minutes to see if there is any presence of alcohol in the individual," she explained.

"There has been two pilots, in London and in Yorkshire, there has been very positive feedback from offenders.

"They believed that it had a positive impact on their life and upon their health as well as the risk of reoffending.



*Heather Nicholls of the National Probation Service said that the tags could have a positive impact on offenders.
Credit: ITV Wales*

"What the tag does allows the individual to go around their everyday lives as normal," she continued.

"It will be a gradual build-up but courts are ready to sentence to this requirement in Wales."

The tags are due to be rolled out to England in the Spring of 2021.