

Sobriety tags launched in England for offenders committing alcohol-related crimes

The devices test an offender's sweat every half an hour and alert probation services if alcohol is detected.

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After launching in Wales the scheme is being rolled out to England

Criminals in England who commit alcohol-related crimes may have to wear ankle tags that monitor their sweat every 30 minutes.

It is part of a scheme being rolled out in England today, following its [launch in Wales last October](#).

Probation officers will be alerted if the sobriety tags detect alcohol in the sweat and the offender could then face fines or other sentences in court.

The tags can tell the difference between drinks and other alcohol, such as hand sanitiser or perfume, and they can also tell if someone tries to block contact between the device and their skin.

At the same time, offenders will get professional help to deal with their drinking issues.

In Wales, the scheme has been used for more than 100 offenders and they have remained sober on more than 95% of the days they were monitored, the Ministry of Justice said.



In Wales the technology has been used on more than 100 offenders

One former prisoner, who did not want to be identified, told Sky News that being offered the chance to wear the tag in the Welsh scheme had "shown me another path".

"I was drinking every day, it was normal for getting into trouble," he said. After missing appointments with his probation officer, he was ordered back to court, where the sobriety tag was raised as an option.

"It was quite a blessing to see the tag, it's shown me another path."

He went on: "I thought I was going to be a drunken mess for the rest of my life...with the tag I've got to fight my demons."



Image: As well as alcohol, the software can also monitor location

Crime and policing minister Kit Malthouse MP said: "These tags have already brought enormous benefit to Wales since they were introduced in October, with one offender I met saying it not only changed his ways, but also saved his life.

"This smart and powerful new tool is helping the fight against alcohol-fuelled violence, which ruins too many lives and families and creates mayhem in our town centres."

Probation officer Laura Harrison said: "Sobriety tags have had an enormously positive effect on the people I've supervised in Wales, improving their mental health, keeping them off drink and out of trouble with the police.

"One man with a history of drink-related violence was given a tag for 90 days and has been sober ever since and says the scheme helped him turn his life around."

Tags will only be used on offenders over the age of 18, who are not alcohol-dependent or on an alcohol treatment requirement.

But Nuno Albuquerque from the UK Addiction Treatment group said the scheme was a "short-term solution" to a "long-term problem".

He said: "Tagging them simply stigmatises them drinking alcohol and doesn't address the root cause of the problem.

"We'd welcome information as to how these people are supported in order to prevent them from drinking once the tag comes off.

"Collaborative support between probation teams and treatment providers needs to be in place so that when the tag comes off, the person won't want to drink, rather than being forced not to drink."

The Ministry of Justice said alcohol plays a role in 39% of violent crime and the social and economic cost of drink-related harm is estimated at around £21.5bn.