
National Resource Toxicologist Pilot Program

The National Resource Toxicologist Pilot Program is a multi-year (2020-2022) national assessment of forensic toxicology laboratories to identify challenges, successes, gaps and funding issues related to impaired driving (drugs and alcohol) testing and data.

The Foundation for Advancing Alcohol Responsibility (Responsibility.org) is providing \$150,000 over three years to the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene Forensic Toxicology Section (WSLH) to conduct the assessment.

Why?

Increasing numbers of impaired drivers are multi-substance impaired, meaning they have both drugs and alcohol in their system. However, due to resource constraints many forensic toxicology laboratories are not able to test for a full range of drugs as well as alcohol. This gives an incomplete picture of the scope of impaired driving in the United States.

Plus, in areas where impaired driving test results are also used by the judicial system and/or public health to determine whether/where impaired drivers should go to treatment, not knowing the full extent of what substances the driver was using means decision makers don't have all the information they need to best assess and assist the driver.

Impaired driving is a systemic multi-factor problem, and toxicology laboratories are key potential sources of data to better understand the full extent of the problem in order to increase public safety and decrease tragedies resulting from impaired driving.

What?

During the pilot program, WSLH staff will:

- Conduct a national assessment of toxicology laboratories to identify challenges, successes, gaps, and funding considerations:
 - Utilize research and best practices to promote standardized toxicology methodologies, drug concentration cut off levels, and procedures to enhance toxicology evidence and national data.
 - In conjunction with Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC), American Academy of Forensic Sciences Standards Board (ASB), and National Safety Council (NSC) establish methods, procedures, and policies for screening new drugs.
 - Work with state, local, and private labs to determine obstacles precluding drug testing in all DUID cases (examples: instrumentation needs, personnel, legislative policies, funding, cancellation procedures which are dependent on the BAC, such as .08 or .10).
 - Support labs which do not meet the NSC recommended concentration cutoffs for DUID testing and identify areas in which partners and stakeholders may be able to assist.
 - Assess the Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS) and identify areas in which the quality and timeliness of the data may be improved.
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- Explore new ways to share data more freely with stakeholders (Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS), HSO, Public Health, policy makers, etc.).
- Collaborate with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) on FARS to improve the quality of the data for more accurate representation of traffic fatality and toxicology data.
- Foster communication with stakeholders such as state highway safety offices, law enforcement, attorneys and judges to gauge needs of the laboratory and “customer” and ensure thorough communication with all parties.
- Provide consultation with states or local agencies in creating cohesiveness with toxicology laboratories.
- Provide training in conjunction with the Society of Forensic Toxicologists (SOFT), Law Enforcement Liaison (LEL) Program, Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor (TSRP) programs, judges, state highway safety offices, National Governors Association, National Conference of State Legislatures, National District Attorneys Association, and other opportunities that expand the reach and understanding of toxicology.
- Act as liaison between the toxicology lab (state/region) and national partners such as NHTSA, GHSA, IACP (DEC), National Sheriffs Association, National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE), NSC, other professional toxicology organizations, and universities.
- Serve as a consultant in Frye/Daubert challenges that arise across the country in relation to the DUI/DUID, DRE program and toxicology
- Consult on policy issues related to toxicology at the Federal, state, and local level

Who?

The Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene is the state’s public, environmental and occupational health laboratory. The WSLH Forensic Toxicology Section provides alcohol and drug testing, interpretation of WSLH test results, and court testimony to coroners/medical examiners and law enforcement agencies in Wisconsin. Testing provided to coroners and medical examiners assists these county officials in routine death investigations. Testing for law enforcement agencies is limited to traffic safety and other motor vehicle matters (boats, ATVs and snowmobiles), in support of Wisconsin’s impaired driving laws (Wisconsin Statute 343.305). The WSLH Forensic Toxicology Section receives about 20,000 specimens annually for alcohol and/or drug testing. Approximately 10% of these specimens are for death investigations. WSLH Toxicology staff also provide education and training to members of law enforcement, attorneys and judges in Wisconsin and nationally, as well as serve in leadership positions in national forensic toxicology organizations.

The Foundation for Advancing Alcohol Responsibility (Responsibility.org) is a national not-for-profit that aims to eliminate drunk driving and work with key partners and a National Advisory Board and Judicial Advisory Board to end all impaired driving, eliminate underage drinking, and empower adults to make a lifetime of responsible alcohol choices as part of a balanced lifestyle. Responsibility.org is funded by leading distillers. As part of efforts to eliminate impaired driving, Responsibility.org supports the creation of innovative programs and evidence-based countermeasures that are proven to prevent impaired driving.

More information

For more information about the National Resource Toxicologist Pilot Program, please contact WSLH Forensic Toxicology Section Director Amy Miles at amy.miles@slh.wisc.edu or 608-224-6247.