

the **RED CUP** Q&A



separating alcohol fact from fiction
EVERY TUESDAY IN THE DAILY WILDCAT

Q Are breathalyzers accurate and do I have to comply?

A. It depends. A breathalyzer is a device used to ascertain whether someone is intoxicated and to what level. They are designed to read a person's Breath Alcohol Concentration and accomplish this by having the person blow into a disposable mouthpiece. Alcohol that has been absorbed into our bloodstream passes through tiny capillaries lining the lungs where it vaporizes and is carried out of the lungs in our exhaled breath.

The accuracy of a breathalyzer depends on the quality of the device and following directions for use. Faulty readings can occur when blowing immediately after drinking and by reusing the mouthpiece. Testers range from small disposable personal devices (not so accurate) to larger hand held testers, costing thousands of dollars, used by law enforcement. To maintain a high level of accuracy in those units, regular maintenance and calibration is required.

The industry standard for measuring the degree to which a person is impaired is to draw blood for a BAC (Blood Alcohol Concentration). You may be surprised to learn that some Arizona law enforcement agencies now use phlebotomy trained officers to do blood draws in the field.

Compliance?

If you are being cited for an MIP, there is usually not a reason for the officer to obtain a breathalyzer reading because an underage citation only requires the establishment of probable cause (the drunk walk back to your dorm, slurring words, odor of alcohol, etc.) This can involve a field sobriety test (walk straight, count backwards, follow the pencil without moving your head, etc.).

And no, you don't have to submit to a breathalyzer test, but if you were stopped while driving, your license will be suspended for one year and you will still be prosecuted for DUI. Also, a search warrant can be obtained for a blood test to determine your BAC. The best option is to not get behind the wheel after imbibing.



wildfact

3.7% of UA students received an MIP in the past year (not necessarily at UA)

(2011 Health & Wellness Survey, N=2,479)



Got a question about alcohol?

Email it to redcup@email.arizona.edu



www.health.arizona.edu

The Red Cup Q&A is written by Lynn Reyes, LCSW, LSAC, David Salafsky, MPH, Lee Ann Hamilton, MA, CHES, and Spencer Gorin, RN, in the Health Promotion and Preventive Services (HPPS) department of the UA Campus Health Service.