

Inside Justice: A Summer Interns Perspective

Three Drinks and a Lesson: What a Mock DUI Taught Me About Justice

Section 3: Intoxilyzer 9000 & Booking

I was escorted inside to the prisoner processing and detainment area and into a room with a machine that read “Intoxilyzer 9000.” I sat next to the dark gray machine, which looked like an old printer with a tube attached. The officer uncuffed me, a courtesy they extend to potential DUI offenders who cooperate, and we waited 5-10 minutes for the machine to calibrate. When it finally did, the officer grabbed a one-use disposable mouthpiece to attach to the tube. The breathalyzer measures grams of alcohol per 210 liters of breath and requires the individual to blow into the tube for roughly 15-20 seconds. If the individual fails to blow into the tube at an acceptable force, the machine does not calculate or make noise that signals proper use. In other words, this is another test you can’t fake.

I took a deep breath and blew into the tube. I watched a bar at the bottom of the screen that measures test completion fill up as I progressed. I ran out of breath before I was halfway there, inhaled, and blew again. This happened another time before the machine beeped and ran the results. The officer said that most people don’t take a deep enough breath on their first go because they don’t anticipate the machine taking as long and requiring as much force of breath. The breathalyzer is connected to a printer, where the results come out as a report that includes the individual's name, the date, and their alcohol content. I was labeled as a John Doe for training purposes, as the results would

otherwise be sent to the local court. My results showed .077 grams of alcohol per 210 liters of breath. Officers consider potential machine inaccuracies when conducting the breathalyzer by averaging the results from two tests. I took a bigger breath in preparation for the second run through and was able to complete it without breaks. I blew a .081, averaging a score of .079. The officer informed me that my score was the closest to .08, the legal limit, that he's seen at the department. My official printed test results indicated my breath alcohol content as .07 grams, which is technically under the legal limit. The officers shared that if I scored this close and took as many breaths during then first breathalyzer in a real DUI investigation, they would wait a few minutes and have me re-breathalyzed. People are often on the intoxication "come up" at the station, and will blow higher the second time around.

After the test, we toured the detainment cells and prisoner booking area, which included a dark gray backdrop and camera officers use to photograph prisoners. A lockless bathroom is outside of the processing area to prevent prisoners not in a cell from escaping or barricading themselves inside. The detainment cells were windowless and ventless, containing only a metal toilet, a bed, a mattress pad, and a wool blanket. There is a small room attached to the cell that locks from both sides. That way, when officers come in, the prisoner cannot escape into the hallway.