

Polish regulations on preventing driving under the influence of alcohol and the use of alcohol interlocks

The problem of alcohol in road traffic in Poland

According to statistics from the National Police Headquarters in Poland in 2001 the number of road accidents involving drivers under the influence of alcohol amounted to 6,230. In 2025, the Police consistently eliminated drunk drivers from the road. Officers conducted a record 17,902,284 alcohol tests, an 11.6% increase compared to the previous year. The police officers identified 95,262 drunk drivers, an increase of 2,938 compared to 2024. In 2025, there were 1,174 accidents caused by drivers under the influence of alcohol - around 7.0% decrease. In these incidents, 137 people died (a 29 % decrease), and 1,439 were injured. Of the total number of accidents caused by drivers, people under the influence of alcohol accounted for 5.9% of the perpetrators. The data clearly indicates a decrease of 56 incidents and 39 fatalities, respectively, compared to 2024. However, the number of people injured in road accidents caused by drivers under the influence of alcohol increased slightly – 1,450 in 2025 compared to 1,441 in 2024 (an increase of 9).

The decrease in these numbers is due to the increased activity of traffic police officers, whose actions contributed to reducing the risk posed by drunk drivers. These data confirm the effectiveness of intensive sobriety checkpoints and consistent police action against drivers who pose a real threat to road safety.

According to ESRA (E-Survey of Road users` Attitudes) research conducted in 2023, only 4.2% of drivers in Poland reported driving under the influence of alcohol in the last 30 days, the lowest percentage among EU countries.

The EU's Road Safety Policy Framework 2021-2030 introduced for the first time a list of 8 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which are used to measure overall road safety performance in the EU countries. The KPIs were further detailed in the EU Strategic Action Plan on Road Safety. The KPIs are the core of the Trendline project, which is a major European road safety initiative that tracks, analyzes, and standardizes KPIs to help member states measure and improve traffic safety. The project, coordinated by the Dutch SWOV Institute for Road Safety Research, supports evidence-based policymaking aimed at reducing traffic fatalities. One of the indicators is percentage of drivers within the legal limit for blood alcohol content (BAC).

Poland also ranks among the top European countries in terms of driver compliance with sobriety requirements. Among random breath alcohol tests, as many as 99.8% returned negative results.

Penalties for drunk driving in Poland

The permissible limit of BAC for driving in Poland is 0.2 per mille in the blood, which corresponds to 0.1 mg/l of exhaled air.

Anything above these values constitutes a violation of the law, with two distinct situations:

- 0.2–0.5 per mille in the blood (0.10 to 0.25 mg/l of exhaled air): being under the influence of alcohol, which constitutes an offence,
- over 0.5 per mille in the blood (over 0.25 mg/l of exhaled air): being intoxicated, which constitutes a crime.

Driving under the influence of alcohol is punishable by imprisonment for 5 to 30 days or a fine of at least PLN 2,500 (maximum PLN 30,000). 1 EUR = 4.28 PLN.

Driving being intoxicated is punishable by imprisonment for up to three years. The driver is also required to pay between PLN 5,000 and PLN 60,000 to the Victim Assistance and Post-Penitentiary Assistance Fund. Penalties for causing an accident while under the influence of alcohol are even higher, and are graded depending on the consequences of the incident:

Accident without fatalities: up to 3 years in prison, compensation of PLN 10,000-60,000.

Accident with fatality or serious bodily injury: 3 to 16 years in prison, compensation of PLN 10,000-60,000.

Crash with fatalities: up to 15 years in prison, compensation of PLN 10,000-60,000.

Other penalties include the suspension of a driver's license or even confiscation of the vehicle. The latter can occur:

- when the driver's blood alcohol concentration exceeds 1.5 per mille,
- when the driver causes an accident while under the influence of alcohol,
- when the driver commits the offense of driving under the influence for the second time within two years.

From 3 March 2026, expanded regulations for young drivers came into force, introducing a formal probationary period and the possibility of obtaining a category B driving license at the age of 17 under the supervision of an experienced driver.

These new regulations also introduced the probationary period for those obtaining a category B driving license for the first time. For adult drivers, the probationary period will last two years, while for those who obtain their license at age 17, the probationary period will last three years, but no longer than until they turn 20. For underage drivers, there is zero tolerance for alcohol and psychoactive substances.

Historical outline and regulations regarding the installation of alcohol interlocks in vehicles in Poland

On January 1, 2014, one of the worst road tragedies in Poland occurred in Kamień Pomorski. A 26-year-old driver, drunk and high on drugs, lost control of his passenger car, skidded, and plowed into a group of pedestrians. Five adults died at the scene, and a sixth died shortly afterward in hospital. One child was among the victims. The victims were family members and their friends who were out for a New Year's Eve stroll. Two other children were seriously injured. The driver had a blood alcohol content of over 2 per mille and was under the influence of amphetamines. After the collision, he attempted to flee the scene but was apprehended by witnesses. In October 2016, the Court of Appeal in Szczecin finally sentenced the perpetrator to 15 years in prison. He was also banned from driving for life.

This event sparked a nationwide debate and accelerated work on regulations regarding alcohol interlocks in Poland. Although the Kamień Pomorski case significantly publicized the issue, the legal provisions themselves came into force in May 2015 and became fully applicable in August 2016.

These devices are intended for drivers convicted of driving under the influence and who have been issued a driving ban. It's worth noting that, according to EU requirements, from July 2024, every newly manufactured car must be factory-ready for easy installation of such interlocks.

In Poland, an alcolock is a device integrated into a vehicle's electrical system that prevents the engine from starting if the driver's breath alcohol concentration exceeds ≈ 0.1 mg/l (the equivalent of 0.2 per mille in the blood).

It allows for the legal reinstatement of driving privileges after a conviction for driving under the influence. Detailed regulations include the following:

Requirements for applying for installation (Penal Code)

Pursuant to the Penal Code, a court may authorize driving vehicles equipped with an alcolock instead of a driving ban if the driver meets certain criteria:

- **Standard temporary ban (fixed term):** An application can be submitted after serving at least half of the imposed driving ban period.
- **Lifetime ban:** An application for an alcolock can be submitted after serving at least 10 years of this penalty.
- **Personal Premises:** The attitude, characteristics, personal circumstances of the perpetrator, and their behavior must justify the belief that they will not pose a threat to road safety again.

A driver may apply to the court to have their driving ban replaced with an alcolock after meeting two main time requirements (depending on the length of the sentence imposed) and demonstrating a positive attitude. The submitted application must justify the belief that the driver's conduct and attitude indicate that driving again will not pose a threat to road safety. To exercise this option, an appropriate application must be submitted to the district court that issued the judgment. If the decision is positive, the appropriate code (code 69) will be entered on the driver's license, indicating the right to drive only vehicles equipped with an alcolock.

Obligations and Costs

- **Standards and Installation:** The device must meet stringent European standards and be installed only by authorized service centers.
- **Cost:** Purchasing an interlock costs between PLN 3,000 and PLN 5,000, and renting one typically ranges from PLN 59 to PLN 100 per month (plus installation and inspection costs).
- **Calibration:** The alcolock requires annual calibration (costing between PLN 150 and PLN 300).
- **Inspection at a Vehicle Inspection Station:** After installation or calibration, the driver is required to undergo an additional technical inspection at a Vehicle Inspection Station.

Legal Consequences and Use

- **Driver's License Code:** After obtaining court approval, the district governor issues a new driver's license with the restriction code "69" entered.
- **Driving without an interlock:** Violation of the requirement to drive a vehicle without a functional and certified interlock is a crime (in accordance with the Penal Code), which is punishable by imprisonment from 3 months to 5 years and a lifetime driving ban.
- **Alcohol interlocks are installed:**
 - voluntarily (most often in school buses and vehicles transporting people and goods),
 - mandatorily in the vehicles of drivers convicted of driving under the influence of alcohol, including those of repeat offenders, i.e., drivers with a history of alcohol-related offenses or accidents.

Installing an alcohol interlock device in Poland may be difficult mainly due to strict legal requirements (the need to serve half of the sentence), high costs of purchasing and legalizing the device, and the bureaucracy involved in obtaining court approval.

- Costs: - The average annual cost of installing and maintaining the device ranges from €800 to €1,200.

Statistics on alcohol interlocks in Poland

In Poland, the exact number of vehicles with a physically installed alcohol interlock device is not published in a single, open register. It is estimated that only a few thousand drivers use this solution on a regular basis each year, while approximately 50,000 people are convicted of driving under the influence.

According to the data, in 2023, 125,970 people in Poland were banned from driving due to driving under the influence of alcohol, and in the first half of 2024 - 58,355. When it comes to the ban on driving vehicles not equipped with an alcohol interlock, the highest number of them was recorded in 2022 (4,171), in 2023 there were 2,537 of them, and in the first half of 2024 - 1,332.