

# DRINKING ON THE JOB

Volunteers get intoxicated to show police clues to behavior

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I stumbled, I tilted, my eyes nearly crossed and jokes not usually funny were suddenly hilarious. I was hung over by 7 p. m., and it was all in the line of duty. Sort of.

But that's what happens when a couple of very willing cops, a volunteer, a ringer and a reporter get drunk and act as guinea pigs for police officers training in administering field sobriety tests — those tests you take standing on the side of the road after you've been pulled over by a police officer suspicious of your driving.

It was the fourth three-day class of its type at the Washtenaw Community College police academy, and trainers called it the best one yet.

It's called the Horizontal Gaze Nystagmus class, and it started three years ago when Ann Arbor Police and Michigan State Police moved to standardize field sobriety testing and training across the state.

The training is for police officers already in the field, according to Ralph Galvin, director of public service training at WCC.



So 16 Michigan State Police troopers from around southeastern Michigan and six officers from other departments are learning how to conduct the standardized field sobriety tests.

## TESTS

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They do that in what most people might find an interesting manner.

They get people drunk. On purpose. And they keep them that way for five hours. On empty stomachs.

Here was my chance, according to one friendly cop. My chance for what, I wondered. Blackmail? Oh, no, he said, HE'D be getting drunk too. He was right — here WAS my chance.

So off we toddled, soon to drink the most amazing amounts of liquor, on stomachs we had been ordered to keep empty.

By learning the weight of the guinea pigs, the testers determined how much alcohol we should drink to get us to various levels of intoxication.

Having had only an orange and a bottle of seltzer all day, beginning at 1 p.m. Wednesday, I drank the equivalent of about four shots of vodka, mixed with orange juice, in 35 minutes. I was allowed up to an hour to drink it. I was supposed to register .08 on a breath test, legally impaired, but not intoxicated.

Washtenaw Sheriff's Sgt. Brian Miller, who tips the scales at about 240 pounds, downed 15 shots of whiskey. He was aiming for a .14 blood alcohol content, almost half again the legal .10 level.

Deputy Ted Williams drank about six shots.

Deputy Cindy Squires downed about five shots, aiming for a .10.

A volunteer named Shawn drank about 5-1/2 shots.

Mariellen, a small woman, aimed for a .14.

At the end of the hour, we were given breath tests. I registered only .07, so they gave me half again as much liquor as I'd had before. Next time, I registered .11, over the legal intoxication limit. By this time, I told trainers confidently, I felt a little high, but not nearly as drunk as I'd expected from hearing stories from police.

Shawn was glassy-eyed.

Miller, William, Squires and I were suddenly finding hilarious an awful lot of things that weren't particularly funny. Mariellen played cards with Galvin.

By 3 p.m., we were directed to act under testing as if we didn't

turn and walk nine steps back keeping your arms at your side looking at your feet, counting out loud," they said.

Now, that's a lot to remember when you're drunk and think you aren't.

Maybe that's why I fell off the line three times, my arms flailed to keep me vertical and I turned the wrong way — FOUR TIMES — before I finally got it right — sort of.

And, oh! the exclamations of joy from the testers when they watched my eyes bounce around in my head!

That was the nystagmus test — a medical reaction in the eyes to, among other things, alcohol.

Testers hold a pen or similar object in front of and just over the head of the driver, and move it slowly back and forth in front of the driver's face.

The eyes of most people who have been drinking will start to jerk, rather than glide, as they follow the pen. The sooner they jerk, the more the driver has had to drink.

Testers should be able to calculate, within 2-5 percent, the blood alcohol level of the driver.

Well, they nailed me, all right. I could even feel my eyes jerking as they followed the pen, and there wasn't a thing I could do about it.

They didn't trip me up, though, on my ABC's. And I think I scared a few of 'em when I was told to close my eyes, throw back my head and recite my middle name, letters between L and Q and occupation — yes, there were definitely a few glances between the testers when I got the first two answers right, and announced "reporter" on the last question.

Meanwhile, Williams was jive-walking his line; Miller, who blew a .18, was having trouble standing up he was laughing so hard; and a lot of cops were puzzled about Mariellen.

It seems she was a ringer. She's done this before, and she's a rarity, someone who doesn't have an accurate nystagmus. She's also a "seasoned" drinker who is able to mask many of her other symptoms.

She blew a .16 — plenty intoxicated — on the breath test. No one es-