

Keep DUI suspects in jail until sober

For the safety of the public plus the protection of those arrested, Natrona County needs to change its policy of allowing people charged with drunken driving to bond out of jail before they are sober.

The case of a former doctor in Casper last weekend aptly demonstrated why the current policy isn't effective, and why a new state law is also needed.

Albert Metz Jr., 67, was arrested by city police last Sunday night for allegedly driving 61 mph in a 40 mph zone on Wyoming Boulevard.

According to the officer, the driver said he had "some wine" earlier in the day. A Breathalyzer test showed his blood alcohol content at .087, above the legal limit of .08.

Metz spent about two hours in the Natrona County Detention Center before he was bonded out. As he left, a Wyoming Highway Patrol trooper said he saw Metz's car drive through a stop sign at the intersection of Salt Creek Highway and Foster Street — just 25 yards from the driveway to the jail's parking lot. Metz explained that he had been arrested earlier for driving under the influence.

Another test indicated his blood alcohol content was .061, below the limit to be presumed too drunk to drive. However, the law also states that a person is considered drunk if alcohol makes him or her incapable of driving safely. About 12:30 a.m. Monday, Metz was arrested again.

[Metz pleaded not guilty to both DUI charges. A headline on our story Friday that described how he pleaded was incorrect. We regret the error.]

Our view

Natrona County needs to change its policy that allows a DUI suspect to be released on bail even if he is still intoxicated.

What do you think?

We welcome viewpoints from our readers on this and other issues.

Each county has its own policy. Metz would not have been in a position to be arrested twice — nor would the public's safety have been endangered — if Natrona County had a policy like several other counties that requires inmates to

The Senate Judiciary Committee definitely made a mistake when it killed Landen's measure. It should be revived and passed in 2011.

Fortunately, Metz didn't injure anyone, but his case should remind us of the potential danger if a DUI suspect is released too early. Let's not follow the example of New Jersey, which didn't enact its state law until 2001, after a young naval officer was killed by a drunken driver who had already been in jail that day and bailed out by a friend. It shouldn't take another tragedy for state lawmakers to make a common-sense decision that would protect the public.

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remain in jail until tests indicate they no longer have alcohol in their systems. Natrona County allows a suspect to be freed after posting a preset \$550 bond.

District Attorney Mike Blonigen said that's one of the lowest amounts in the state, and it hasn't been changed for at least a quarter of a century. He advocated for a system that requires DUI suspects to be held until their initial appearance in Circuit Court the next afternoon.

That's one potential answer.

Another is to keep them locked up until they have a BAC that shows they are sober [which would need to

be defined]. Rather than have 23 counties each develop a policy, it makes sense for the Legislature to pass a state law that would clearly spell out the requirements for a DUI suspect to be released from jail.

Sen. Bill Landen, R-Casper, and several other local legislators pushed for such a bill in 2008 after a Casper motorist was arrested for DUI. He was bailed out, drank more alcohol at a bar and got behind the wheel again, this time hitting a pedestrian and dragging him under the vehicle for more than a mile before stopping. The man, who survived, had massive internal injuries; the driver was sent to prison.