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Sensing Drugged Driving: Diagnostic anSERS receives SBIR for roadside drug test

Diagnostic anSERS Inc. has been awarded a $150,000 grant by the National Science Foundation to develop a paper-based test for identifying drugged drivers, building on their low-cost yet highly sensitive and reliable P-SERS™ testing platform.

College Park, MD – Diagnostic anSERS announced today that the National Science Foundation (NSF) has awarded the company a Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) Phase I grant to identify drugged drivers. With the $150,000 funding, Diagnostic anSERS will develop a paper-based test strip to enable rapid roadside screening for driver drug impairment, a particularly pressing need. A recent report by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found that 13.6% of weekend nighttime drivers tested positive for illegal drugs, as compared to only 1.5% being drunk (NHTSA 2013-2014 National Roadside Survey). At present, no effective roadside drug intoxication test exists.

Currently, most states employ Drug Recognition Experts (DREs) to combat drugged drivers. DREs are law enforcement officers specifically trained to identify a variety of signs indicative of drug use, such as coordination and pupil size. However, sobriety exams are time consuming. This, combined with the rising incidence of drug use, means that DREs simply cannot keep up. Compounding this problem is the high cost of keeping a DRE on staff, which severely limits law enforcement's ability to keep drugged drivers off the roads.

"We have interviewed numerous law enforcement officials about their needs, and this was, by far, the biggest and most urgent one. Right now, officers have to either rely on highly trained, highly paid Drug Recognition Experts or let the suspect go. There is no existing cost-effective solution," said Sean Virgile, co-founder of Diagnostic anSERS.

With the societal shift toward decriminalization of marijuana, this problem is only expected to grow. Drivers who have consumed illicit drugs are more likely to be involved in a fatal accident. Drugged driving triples the chance for an accident. Drivers who consume a combination of alcohol and an illegal drug have an incredible 23 times higher risk of crashing. (NHTSA, Drug and Alcohol Crash Risk, 2015)

Diagnostic anSERS's innovative ink-jet printed P-SERS™ sensors enable the trace detection of a wide variety of chemicals, including narcotics, pesticides, and explosives. This Phase I SBIR, titled *Low-cost sensors for rapid narcotic intoxication screening in the field*, supports the development of modified P-SERS™ sensors to detect traces of drugs in saliva. This new saliva test will allow a police officer to more accurately determine if a driver is *currently* under the influence of illegal drug, as opposed to existing urine and hair tests which only identify prior drug usage.

"We are extremely pleased to receive this SBIR award from the NSF. It is an affirmation of their confidence in our innovative sensing platform. Not only will this cutting-edge technology make our roads safer, the underlying science has the potential to transform the way we diagnose disease in the future. " says Wei Yu, the inventor of P-SERS™ sensors.

About Diagnostic anSERS, Inc.: Diagnostic anSERS is a spin-out from the University of Maryland dedicated to improving public health and safety through chemical sensing. For more information, please visit: www.diagnosticansers.com