Anti-Drunk-Driving Program Appears To Be Working Well

As Disraeli put it, “There are three kinds of lies: Lies, Damned Lies and Statistics.”

Numbers can be twisted to show almost anything you want them to. For instance, a decrease in arrests could be interpreted as a drop in crime. But it also could mean that police aren’t doing their job as well.

Similarly, an increase in arrests could mean an increase in crime — or that police are doing their job better.

A new anti-drunk-driving program in Lafayette offers some interesting statistics that leave few loopholes. It’s good news for almost everyone but the victims.

What’s Drunk?
The program aims at getting drunk drivers off the road. To be drunk, a person doesn’t have to be weaving all over the road, running off the shoulder and across the center line. A .10 reading on a breath analysis machine is considered legally drunk and some people think they can operate a vehicle quite well at that level. That’s when they get dangerous.

Many people said that a crackdown on drunk driving in Lafayette just wouldn’t work. People here like to party too much, they said, and no program is going to interfere with that.

Maybe so, but people apparently have found better ways to have a good time without getting out on the highway drunk and smashing their cars into others.

Since the ATAC (Alcohol Traffic Action Campaign) program started, the number of high-severity alcohol-related wrecks has dropped. In January and February of last year, 22 serious wrecks were caused by drunk drivers. This year, the count dropped to three.

In the first two months of 1982, 77 wrecks were caused by drinking drivers. Three people were killed. This year, the count dropped to 63 wrecks with two people killed.

The total number of accidents, regardless of whether drivers were drinking, also dropped from 1,225 last year to 898 this year.

It’s possible that the ATAC program, coupled with stiffer fines and jail terms for drunk drivers, has scared some people off the road. But some people are stubborn.

260 Arrests In 60 Days
The stepped-up patrol for drunk drivers has reeled in 260 people in the past two months. A year ago, 175 were arrested in the same period. Most of the arrests are being made between 6 p.m. and 4 a.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays.

So far, most of the arrests have been valid. Of 104 cases that have gone to court, 98 resulted in convictions, a rate of 94 percent.

The conviction rate might get better because starting today, four full-time officers will be on the job and the testing of people nabbed by the ATAC team will be video-taped.

It will be mighty tough to argue innocence while a film shows people swaying while trying to walk a chalk line or missing their noses with the tips of their fingers.