

Drivers who are convicted of DWI or other offenses face new test

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GLENS FALLS — If you are convicted of drunken driving or other serious driving offenses in Warren County in the coming months, a video game may help determine your sentence, and in some cases, when you get your license back.

Glens Falls City Court has been chosen as the site for state's court system's first computerized driving simulator as part of a pilot program to better educate problem drivers.

A conference room in the court in City Hall has been equipped with a video game-like simulator complete with steering wheel, gas and brake pedals and a computer that will give a score to those who try to run through its course. The program also gives driving safety instruction as you go.

Glens Falls City Judge Gary Hobbs said the state Office of Court Administration reached out to him to see if he would allow one of the systems at his court to test it for possible use around the court system. Only a handful of others are in use around the country as part of the pilot program.

The system has been installed in a conference room in the third-floor court area in City Court, with use by drivers who wind up in court to begin later this month.

Hobbs said he can order those convicted of driving while intoxicated, driving while ability impaired or using a cellphone while driving, or those who have multiple moving violations, to complete the test if drivers want a reduction on their tickets. Courts around the county will have the option of sentencing drivers to use it, Hobbs said.

The program takes three hours, and those who take it get a final score from 0 to 100.

It's not a simple kid's video game, and a reporter who tried it out learned quickly that it has sensitive brake and gas pedals. (Hobbs said he "crashed" the first time he tried it.)

"I think this is more difficult than driving a car," the judge said. "A collision is an instant failure."

The machine gives the court a written report when the test is done.

The only driver to make it through the test unscathed during the first few days of operations was Doug Dutcher, the state court officer sergeant assigned to City Court.

Dutcher said he believed the simulator made him a safer driver and improved his awareness of potential problems on the road.

Hobbs said the simulator has also been offered for use to Glens Falls High School to counter the loss of defensive-driving programs that schools used to offer.

http://poststar.com/news/local/drivers-who-are-convicted-of-dwi-or-other-offenses-face/article_3140dc4a-2ea1-5f4f-800d-436c2827c143.html