

**State of North Carolina**  
**Forensic Tests for Alcohol Branch**  
**Department of Health & Human Services**

**North Carolina Drug Evaluation & Classification Program**

**Drug Recognition Expert (DRE) Requirements**

The Drug Evaluation and Classification (DEC) Program is a transportation safety program focusing on the detection and apprehension of drug-impaired drivers. The program is managed and coordinated by the *International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP)* with support from the *National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) of the U.S. Department of Transportation*.

The DEC Program (also referred to as the Drug Recognition Expert (DRE) Program) was developed in the early 1970s in Los Angeles, California, by the Los Angeles Police Department. Due to the program's success in identifying drug-impaired drivers, it soon became an international program expanding to other states and eventually into Canada and other countries. Currently, all **50 states**, plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Guam, participate in the DEC Program in the United States.

The DEC Program trains police officers and other public safety officials as DRE officers through a three-phase training curriculum that includes the following:

- **Phase I-** Drug Recognition Expert Preliminary-School (16 hours)
- **Phase II-** Drug Recognition Expert School (64 hours)
- **Phase III-** Drug Recognition Expert Field Certification (Approximately 40 hours)

The training relies heavily upon the Standardized Field Sobriety Tests (SFST), which provide the foundation for the DEC Program. Once trained and certified the DRE officer becomes a highly effective officer skilled in the detection and identification of persons impaired or affected by alcohol and/or drugs. DRE officers are trained to conduct a standardized and systematic 12-step evaluation consisting of physical, mental, and medical components.

The DEC Program has received national acclaim for its success in identifying the drug-impaired driver. Officers trained as a DRE officer are frequently called upon to differentiate between drug influence and medical and/or mental disorders. The certified DRE officer is an extremely valuable tool in combating the adverse impact of drug and alcohol impaired driving in our communities.

**DRE School is extremely demanding.** To receive certification as a DRE officer, three phases of training must be completed. The following summarizes each phase:

**ACADEMIC TRAINING:** In NC, this phase is typically conducted over a minimum of ten (10) days (80 hours); there is a 2-day DRE Preliminary-School and an 8-Day DRE School. It includes courses in physiology, vital signs, SFST, and extensive material on each of the seven categories of the drugs of abuse. The training includes three written examinations, SFST proficiency examination and five written quizzes; misspellings constitute a missed answer. Failure to successfully achieve 80% on the DRE Pre-School written exam and/or demonstrate SFST Proficiency will result in the student not being admitted into the 8-Day DRE School. During the academic phase, students must achieve a minimum score (80%) on the three examinations, and must demonstrate proficiency in administering SFST to progress to the certification phase.

**CERTIFICATION PHASE:** After successfully completing the academic portion, the students must complete the mandatory certification-phase. It is the student's responsibility to complete the certification requirements **within six months** following the DRE School. These requirements include: conducting a minimum of 12 drug influence evaluations while under the supervision of a DRE Instructor; identifying subjects under the influence of three of the seven drug categories; and attaining a toxicological confirmation. In addition, the student must maintain a Progress Log, Rolling Log and submit a written resume. Finally, the student must pass a comprehensive final knowledge examination, and obtain the written endorsement of two certified DRE instructors.

The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) is the regulating and credentialing body for the DEC Program. The NC State Coordinator certifies you as a DRE, and certification is valid for two years. To maintain certification, DRE officers must conduct a minimum of **four (4) evaluations** every two years (one of which must be supervised by a DRE Instructor), must have submitted all previous and current drug evaluation reports, submit an updated rolling log, updated Curriculum Vitae, and attend 8-hours of State Coordinator approved DRE In-service Training.

To be considered for DRE training, the following is the recommended criteria:

***\*Exceptions may be made at the discretion of the State DRE Program Coordinator\****

In North Carolina, DRE candidates **MUST** meet the requirements set forth in the NC DRE Training Standards, and at a minimum successfully complete the following prior to applying to attend North Carolina DRE Schools. **Documentation of the successful completion of these courses must accompany all applications.** The requirements listed below are subject to change upon approval of the State DRE Coordinator.

- Must be a sworn law enforcement officer in North Carolina.
- Minimum of two years of law enforcement service.
- Off probation with your present agency.
- Your application must be complete with all documentation at the time of submission.
- Must have completed IACP/NHTSA Standardized Field Sobriety Testing (SFST)
- **If your initial SFST training has been more than 2 years ago, then you must have attended an SFST Refresher within the past 2 years**
- Must have completed 16 hours IACP/NHTSA **ARIDE Training**
- Must have a current State of North Carolina/DHHS Chemical Analyst Permit
- Must have completed an approved FTA Branch Alcohol Screening Test Device training course, and possess a DHHS Certificate (ASTD).
- Must have experience in DWI arrests.
- Written endorsement and/or recommendation from your local District Attorney's Office.
- Must submit at two actual reports from DWI cases, with all associated paperwork, for review.
- Must have a written recommendation from at least one active DRE; preferably, one from outside your home agency.
- Written Letter of Commitment from your agency supporting the use of DRE officers in drug impaired driving cases.
- Attend an oral board interview, if required by the selection committee.

*\* Information submitted will be reviewed to determine applicant selection.*

*\*\*For the complete NC DRE Training Standards, contact the DRE State Program Coordinator*

### **The DRE Drug Evaluation Process**

DRE officers conduct a detailed, diagnostic examination of persons arrested or suspected of drug-impaired driving or similar offenses. Based on the results of the DRE drug evaluation they form an expert opinion as to whether, or not, the person is:

1. Impaired, and if so, is the person able to operate a vehicle safely? If the DRE concludes that the person is impaired;
2. Is the impairment due to an injury, illness, or other medical complication, or is it drug-related? If the DRE concludes that the impairment is due to drug(s);
3. He or she determines which category or combination of categories of drug(s) is the most likely source of the impairment.

DRE officers conduct their evaluations in a controlled environment, typically at a police department, sheriff's office, intake center, troop/district office or other location where impaired drivers are transported after arrest. The drug evaluation is not normally done at roadside and is typically a **post -arrest** procedure.

In some cases, the person evaluated will be a driver the DRE personally arrested. However, in many cases, the DRE officer will be called upon to conduct the evaluation after another officer arrests the driver. The DRE officer is requested to **assist** in the investigation because of their special expertise and skills in identifying drug impairment.

The DRE drug evaluation takes approximately one hour to complete. The DRE officer evaluates and assesses the person's appearance and behavior. He also carefully measures and records vital signs and makes precise observations of the person's automatic responses and reactions. The DRE officer also administers carefully designed psychophysical tests to evaluate the person's judgment, information processing ability, coordination, and various other characteristics. The DRE officer will systematically consider everything about the person that could indicate the influence of a drug(s).

### **The 12 Steps of the Drug Evaluation Process**

The DRE drug evaluation includes twelve major components or steps, which include:

#### **1. The Breath Alcohol Test**

The DRE officer will need to know the result of the suspect's breath alcohol test, if taken. This is important to the DRE officer because he must determine whether, or not, alcohol accounts for the observed impairment. Normally, if the driver's alcohol concentration (AC) level is above 0.08 AC, a DRE drug evaluation is not conducted.

#### **2. The Interview of the Arresting Officer**

If the DRE officer did not make the arrest, he will need to interview the arresting officer prior to the evaluation. This allows the DRE officer to gain an insight on the driving, conduct at roadside, and their performance of the SFSTs.

#### **3. The Preliminary Examination**

During this step, the DRE officer will perform a preliminary examination checking for any evidence of a medical complication that would warrant terminating the evaluation and requesting medical assistance. The driver is asked a series of questions, and the DRE officer conducts a series of eye examinations that assists in making the decision whether the driver is impaired from alcohol and/or drugs or if the impairment may be medically related. If drug impairment is suspected, the DRE officer proceeds with the evaluation.

#### **4. Examinations of the Eyes**

In this step, the DRE officer administers three tests of the suspect's eyes: (1) Horizontal Gaze Nystagmus (HGN), (2) Vertical Gaze Nystagmus and (3) Lack of Convergence.

#### **5. Divided Attention Psychophysical Tests**

The DRE officer conducts a series of psychophysical tests that assists in determining the suspect's condition and if he/she can operate a vehicle safely. The DRE officer administers four divided attention psychophysical tests: (1) the Romberg Balance, (2) Walk and Turn, (3) One Leg Stand, and (4) Modified Finger to Nose.

#### **6. Examination of Vital Signs**

The sixth step requires the DRE officer to make precise measurements of the suspect's pulse rate, blood pressure and body temperature. The suspect's pulse rate is measured three different times during the evaluation. During this step of the evaluation the DRE officer will use medical instruments, including a stethoscope, sphygmomanometer (blood pressure cuff) and an electronic digital thermometer.

#### **7. Dark Room Examinations**

During this step in the evaluation process the DRE will take the suspect into a separate room where the DRE officer can obtain an estimate of the suspect's pupil size in three different lighting conditions. The DRE officer uses a device called a pupilometer and a penlight to conduct the measurements in room light, near total darkness and direct light.

#### **8. Examination for Muscle Tone**

During this step, the DRE officer inspects the suspect's arm muscles checking for muscle tone.

## **9. Examination for Injection Sites**

Many drug abusers inject drugs. So immediately after checking muscle tone, the DRE officer then carefully inspects the driver's arms, hands, fingers, and neck for evidence of recent or past hypodermic needle injections.

## **10. Suspect's Statements and Other Observations**

In this step of the evaluation, the DRE officer questions the driver about specific evidence and observations made during the evaluation.

## **11. Opinions of the Evaluator**

In this step the DRE documents his/her conclusions rendering an expert opinion about the condition of the suspect and the category(s) of drugs causing the impairment.

## **12. The Toxicological Examination**

The final step in the evaluation process is to obtain a blood or urine specimen, which is sent to the laboratory for chemical analysis. The lab analyzes the specimen and reports the findings to the DRE officer.

Once the drug evaluation is completed, the DRE officer submits a detailed report documenting the evaluation, the evidence obtained and his/her opinion as to whether, or not, the suspect was impaired and the category(s) of drugs causing the impairment.

## **How effective is the Drug Evaluation and Classification Program?**

With the inception of the Drug Evaluation and Classification Program and the training of Drug Recognition Experts, many states have experienced a dramatic increase in drug impaired driving arrests and convictions. Two notable examples are Oregon, where drug-impaired driving arrests have increased by 150% since the inception of the program in 1995, and in Washington, where drug-impaired driving arrests have increased 200% since the inception of the program in 1996.

The overall effectiveness of the DEC Program is contingent on the support of the law enforcement agency's administration, the Governor's Highway Safety Office, the laboratories conducting the toxicology, and the prosecutors handling the drugged driving cases. Without these critical components, the program cannot be successful.