

Four DUIs in 30 Hours? People Do Worse During Blackouts

You'd be surprised how many problem drinkers in a blackout have come out of it having flown to another country.

To the untrained eye they may appear sober and rational while complete lack of reason and control have overtaken them, said Dr. Anita Gadhia-Smith, a Washington, D.C., specialist and author of *From Addiction to Recovery: A Therapist's Personal Journey*.

But how could someone do that drunk? Getting through U.S. Customs can be an ordeal when sober. In late-stage alcoholism, blackouts are common: the drinker is conscious but later lacks any memory of events that may include an overseas flight.

"I've been in this business about 20 years and I still see something new almost every day," said [Gadhia-Smith, a recovering alcoholic](#) who had blackouts about every other time she drank. "Getting on a plane is more extreme, but it's something I have heard many times. It happens in late-stage alcoholism. That may be what's going on with the man with the four DUIs."

She was referring to the case of Rhode Island contractor John Lourenco Jr., 53, who was cited in September four times in 30 hours for driving under the influence. Three of the four arrests came between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m. and he crashed four different vehicles, including a dump truck he owns.

A police captain involved in the case called the day-and-a-half DUI streak a "call for help," which officers tried to answer.

Lourenco was charged with various crimes stemming from the series of drunk driving arrests, all of them misdemeanors. Rhode Island police say his first smash-up happened in Providence mid-morning on Sunday, Sept. 14, and injured two small children; the next morning, he had the first of three more crashes in the suburb of Cumberland. Cumberland police say he drove into three other vehicles and a tree.

A call to Lourenco's construction company in Cumberland, a town of about 8,000, was not returned. A defense attorney had not yet been publicly named.

The driver was apparently able to get behind the wheel repeatedly after police cited him for DUI and medics took him to hospitals because he had been released to his parents and managed to slip away from them. Cumberland police said Lourenco submitted to a Breathalyzer test early on that showed his blood-alcohol level at .220 – almost three times the legal limit.

‘Out of Control’

“That does not sound like it was a conscious, rational series of choices on his part,” Gadhia-Smith said. “It sounds like he is at his bottom, that he was just completely, totally, out of control. And probably won’t remember it.”

In the earlier stages of [alcoholism](#), you may see the drinker undergo personality changes but “in later stages you see bizarre acts,” said Gadhia-Smith, who got sober in 1990. “A lot of people can appear to be functioning in a blackout. I had episodes like that. I would get in a car and drive. Sometimes it’s obvious and they are sloppy drunk. Other times they can be in a blackout and nobody would know.”

Alcoholism is a chronic and progressive brain disease. Late-stage alcoholism involves a lower tolerance for alcohol but withdrawal symptoms that demand more and more of the substance. There are usually increased consequences from the crippling disease, with the drinker less able to control his or her behavior when any alcohol is consumed. And the effects of drinking become increasingly severe: decreasing brain mass, damage to the central nervous system, esophageal cancer, liver disease and pancreatitis.

Many crime stories involve suspects experiencing a blackout. In 2007, [Billy Davis](#) of Norman, Okla., shot dead three women but said he was so drunk at the time that he didn’t know what had happened. Then there’s the story of Richard Broom, who, in his book *Cocked and Loaded*, tells the story of how he killed a man while drunk and was sentenced to life in prison.

“I still remember nothing from the night ... I guess it’s hard for one to believe if they’ve never had an alcoholic blackout, but I’m sure that millions of recovering alcoholics could share with me times when they can’t recall things,” [Broom told CBS](#) about the 1982 murder. “I’ve had hundreds of blackouts while intoxicated, and none of the memories ever surfaced.”

Gadhia-Smith was not surprised.

“People commit murders during blackouts, and they wake up in jail not knowing why they’re there,” she said.

But climbing behind the wheel [under the influence](#) will be life-changing for most. The California Highway Patrol, which polices freeways in the country’s most populous state, says a first-time DUI conviction can cost the driver up to \$10,000 in legal fees, fines, insurance hikes and court-mandated education classes. CHP public information officer Juan Galvan told Elements Behavioral Health that a first-time DUI conviction can result in a six-month jail sentence.

How It Happened

According to police in Cumberland, Lourenco was first stopped mid-morning Sunday, Sept. 14, after a crash in Providence. At that time, the [Providence Journal](#) reported, Lourenco drove a Dodge pick-up into an SUV, injuring the 4-year-old and 6-year-old in the backseat. They were seen by a children's hospital and released.

Lourenco was treated at Rhode Island Hospital where, according to *The Journal*, he threw a bottle of urine at workers, threatened an officer and was put in restraints. He was later released to his parents, from whom he would soon slip away and again get behind the wheel after drinking. Police stressed that an impaired driver would not be released unless it was to "a responsible adult, who is taking legal responsibility for the person," Cumberland police Capt. Alan Milligan said.

The next morning, Lourenco surfaced about 14 miles from Providence, in his hometown, and drove a Chevy Malibu into the rear of a family's SUV on a town street. Officers asked him to undergo field sobriety testing, after which they arrested him for DUI and took him to the police station. He agreed to a Breathalyzer test and blew a blood-alcohol level of .220 — nearly three times the legal limit. He was cited on suspicion of drunk driving, a misdemeanor, and again released to his parents. Four hours later, at 11:15 a.m., a traffic patrol officer spotted a 1970 Plymouth Barracuda on a Cumberland road moving "erratically," officials said. A field sobriety test suggested Lourenco was intoxicated and medics took him to Landmark Medical Center, where police handed off custody to the hospital.

Late that afternoon, Lourenco left the hospital and drove his dump truck into a tree.

"The second time we came into contact with him, we took him to the hospital," Capt. Milligan told Elements Behavioral Health. "We thought first of all, he's suffering from alcoholism, and he's definitely acting out. And we need to get him help."