

Toyota to develop anti-drunk driving system

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TOKYO: Japanese auto giant Toyota Motor Corp. will develop a system to stop a vehicle if it detects the driver is drunk as part of efforts to cope with a serious social problem, a report said on Wednesday.

The system, expected to become available in 2009, analyses sweat on the palms of the driver's hands to assess blood alcohol content and would then not allow the vehicle to be started if the reading was above safety limits, the Asahi Shimbun said. The system would also analyze the driver's eye movement, driving performance and other factors, the Asahi said.

European automakers have developed systems that require the driver to blow into a tube attached to a vehicle to detect alcohol in the breath.

Toyota opted not to use that system as it may fail if the driver asks another person to blow into the tube, the Asahi said. Toyota rival Nissan Motor said last year it was planning similar steps. The moves come amid a growing outcry after nearly 14,000 drunk driving accidents in 2005 which left 707 people dead, according to the National Police Agency.

The agency plans to propose to parliament toughening the penalty for driving under the influence to up to a maximum five years in prison from the current three years and doubling the fine to 8,500 dollars.