

## Fatal Error Confusion

The Vermont Department of Health Laboratory (VDHL) in conjunction with the Vermont Criminal Justice Training Council revised the *Infrared Breath Testing Device Student Manual* in December 2007. The VDHL also issued the *DataMaster DMT Addendum* in May 2008 to accompany the training on the new DMT instrument. In both of these manuals, the Error Messages and Responses section was rewritten. Error messages were reorganized into three types of errors: Fatal Errors, Non Fatal Errors and Other Error Conditions. In previous editions of the manual errors were listed alphabetically. As now defined in both manuals:

**Fatal Errors: Although a DataMaster Supervisor or the Vermont Department of Health Laboratory may be able to remedy these error messages, for the purpose of processing, the Officer should consider these “fatal errors” and proceed to a different DataMaster. If another DataMaster is not reasonable available, blood may be drawn. When encountering fatal error messages, post “Out of Service” on the instrument and leave a message for your DataMaster Supervisor.**

**Non Fatal Errors: The following errors may be remedied by the test operator. If after following these instructions the error remains, post “Out of Service” and leave a detailed message to your DataMaster Supervisor regarding when the error occurred and what steps were taken to try to remedy it. Proceed to a different DataMaster, if one is not reasonable available you may have blood drawn. If the error has been cleared, begin the testing procedure again.**

**Other Error Conditions: The following error conditions should be documented but may not necessitate moving to a different DataMaster. A detailed message should be left for the DataMaster Supervisor to remedy the situation for future use.**

When the manual was revised we reorganized the errors into the three categories to make teaching and learning easier. Some of the errors can be easily remedied by the operator. Many of these errors require the same remedy, which is part of the reason for grouping them. If the error is not one that the operator can quickly and easily remedy, we prefer that the operator not waste their time trying, thus naming the error a “Fatal Error.” It is more time efficient for an Officer to move to a new location rather than retrying the breath test, even if the error may or may not reoccur upon retesting.

The term “Fatal Error” is not one from the manufacturer of the DataMaster nor does it indicate a system failure. The term was created by the Health Department to indicate to the Officer that it is more time expedient to continue their processing at another agency.

This is especially the case regarding “Standard Out of Range.” In the event that the simulator has depleted to the point it is no longer within the  $\pm 5\%$  tolerance on the DMT

or the 0.090-0.110 tolerance on the BAC, in all likelihood if the Officer retried the test, the standard result may report within range. However if the result does not come back within range, now the Officer their wasted time.

The term “Non-Fatal” error was again created by the Health Department. This term indicates to the Officer that they must perform a simple repair to continue processing. Often this is something as basic as turning the instrument off for a minute, then turning it back on.

The errors listed under “Other Error Conditions” imply that a note may be left for the DataMaster Supervisor to make a minor correction not affecting the testing protocol, such as setting the time for daylight savings.

The DataMaster instruments are designed in such a way that if the instrument is currently not capable of accurately collecting, analyzing and reporting a valid result, an error message will either be displayed or printed and a breath result will not be generated. If a Subject Test Report has all of the quality control tests and the breath result printed without any error messages, then it is a valid, accurate and reliable result.