Horizontal Gaze Nystagmus is an involuntary jerking of the eyes, occurring as the eyes gaze to the side. It is the observation of the eyes for Horizontal Gaze Nystagmus that provides the first and most accurate test in the Standardized Field Sobriety Test battery. Although this type of nystagmus is indicative of alcohol impairment, its presence may also indicate use of certain other drugs. Examples of other drugs are: CNS Depressants, Inhalants, and Dissociative Anesthetics such as PCP and its analogs.

Vertical Gaze Nystagmus is an involuntary jerking of the eyes (up and down) which occurs when the eyes gaze upward at maximum elevation. The presence of this type of nystagmus is associated with high doses of alcohol for that individual and certain other drugs. The drugs that cause Vertical Gaze Nystagmus are the same ones that cause Horizontal Gaze Nystagmus. There is no drug that will cause Vertical Gaze Nystagmus that may not cause Horizontal Gaze Nystagmus. If Vertical Gaze Nystagmus is present and Horizontal Gaze Nystagmus is not, it could be a medical condition.

For VGN to be recorded, it must be definite, distinct and sustained for a minimum of four seconds at maximum elevation.