



NEWS RELEASE

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DEADLY HOLIDAY WEEKEND PROMPTS CALL FOR SAFE DRIVING AS STATE ENTERS SUMMER SEASON

Primary Seat Belt Law Effective June 9

ST. PAUL — The deadliest Minnesota Memorial Day weekend since 1996 is an urgent reminder for motorists to focus on the importance of safe driving as the state rolls into the summer driving season, according to officials from the Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS). DPS preliminary reports at least 12 traffic deaths over the weekend — nine on Saturday alone.

The State Patrol responded to 10 of the deaths and seven serious injuries over the weekend. The deaths include seven motorists, two motorcyclists and a pedestrian. All crashes are under investigation and detailed on the State Patrol crash report website:

www.dps.state.mn.us/patrol, click on “Media.” Of the seven motorist deaths, two were known to be unbelted — State Patrol investigators say belt use in the quadruple fatal in Olmsted County may not be known due to the extensive damage of the van that was hit by a suspected impaired driver.

During the Memorial Day weekend in 2008, two people were killed on Minnesota roads. In 1996, 13 people died and in 1972, 16 people were killed over the holiday weekend — the highest on record.

“This wave of tragedy demonstrates the ongoing threats on our roads, ranging from impaired driving, to speeding and not paying attention,” says State Patrol Lt. Matt Langer. “Summer is the deadliest time on the roads and this past weekend serves as a serious reminder to take the task of driving seriously.”

During 2005–2008 in June, July and August, there were 476 traffic deaths and 1,798 serious injuries.

Cheri Marti, DPS director of the Office of Traffic Safety says the Memorial Day weekend fatalities also underscore the relevance of the new primary seat belt law. The primary offense means drivers and passengers in all seating positions must be buckled up or in the correct child restraint. Effective June 9, law enforcement can stop motorists for seat belt violations. Minnesota is the 29th state to pass a primary seat belt law following the recent passage by both Arkansas and Florida.

“A seat belt is best defense behind the wheel especially against motorists that are impaired, speeding or driving distracted.” says Marti, adding impaired driving and speeding cases increase over the summer.

A statewide *Click It or Ticket* seat belt enforcement effort continues through May 31.

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