



News Release

District 2300, Marshall Headquarters

Minnesota State Patrol
1800 East College Drive
Marshall, MN 56258

Contact: Lt. John Ebner
Safe & Sober Coordinator
Ph.: (507) 537-3661
Fax: (507) 537-7310

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Troopers in Southwest Minnesota Focus On Impaired Drivers during the Upcoming Enforcement Project

MARSHALL – Troopers will be cracking down on impaired drivers as part of a statewide DWI enforcement effort, August 20 – September 6. The effort is coordinated by the Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS). Around 400 Minnesota law enforcement agencies will participate in the effort aimed toward taking impaired drivers off the road and encouraging motorists to make safe decisions.

DPS reports enhanced DWI enforcement campaigns factored in the state tallying a record-low number of alcohol-related deaths in 2009. The 141 alcohol-related deaths in 2009 is an all-time low. However, impaired driving is still a factor in more than one-third of all deaths, matching historical trends. Drivers must plan for a safe and sober ride and to avoid drinking and driving. Last year, 32,576 motorists were arrested for DWI, a nearly 9 percent decrease from 2008. One in seven Minnesota drivers has a DWI.

Drinking and driving remains a serious problem in Minnesota and across the nation. For 2009, the National Safety Council has made a conservative estimate of \$256 million as the cost of alcohol-related crashes in Minnesota. Predictably, there is a strong positive relationship between alcohol use and crash severity.

“Impaired drivers are an unnecessary added risk to motorists on roadways in southwest Minnesota,” says Lt. John Ebner. “That is why law enforcement will be on the lookout for drivers who display common impaired driving characteristics – swerving, driving erratically, or driving too slow for traffic.”

Minnesota law states that motorists can be arrested for impaired driving even if their alcohol-concentration level is under 0.08 – the state’s legal limit – if they demonstrate impaired driving behavior. The consequences of a DWI can vary depending on many factors including alcohol-concentration, previous offenses and if there was an injury related to a crash. A first-time DWI offense will trigger an automatic driver’s license revocation for a minimum of 90 days. The

cost of a DWI can reach \$20,000 when factoring legal, court and other administrative fees.

Those arrested for DWI now have an option to start driving sooner by having an interlock device installed in their vehicle to regain their driving privileges. Potential participants of the Minnesota Ignition Interlock Program can learn more at www.dps.state.mn.us/ots. Safety officials say this program ensures DWI offenders are driving legally and safely.

Motorists are reminded, especially young adults, to plan ahead for a safe ride home before celebrating. Young people continue to be the primary violators when it comes to impaired driving offenses. Last year, 21-to-34 year-olds committed fully 52% of the incidents on record. Drivers under age 21 accounted for 8%.

The enforcement and education effort is funded by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and is a component of the state's *Toward Zero Deaths* traffic safety program. TZD is an interdisciplinary approach to address traffic issues regionally through enforcement, education, engineering and emergency trauma care.

Drunk Driving. Over The Limit. Under Arrest.

