



Nov. 30, 2010

10-308

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“3-D Month” encourages safe, sober driving

SALEM – Safety advocates are gearing up to bring the message home about driving sober, and it begins with December being proclaimed “Drinking and Drugged Driving Awareness Month” by Governor Ted Kulongoski. Also known as “3-D Month,” the campaign includes increased enforcement around the state aimed at reducing crashes caused by impaired drivers.

“Whether you are out shopping, visiting friends or celebrating with family, we encourage you to plan ahead, be alert, and don’t drink and drive,” said Linda Fisher-Lewis, Safety Division DUII program manager. “We hope you will do everything you can to make the holidays safe.”

The national “Drunk Driving. Over the Limit. Under Arrest.” campaign will be on the air and on the minds of law enforcement as they work to get impaired drivers off the road. Last year during the Christmas/New Year’s holidays in Oregon, two people died in alcohol-involved crashes; in 2008, there were six fatalities from alcohol-involved crashes over the holidays. Motorists are attaching red ribbons to their vehicles to serve as reminders to drive safe and sober. Ribbons are free and available at DMV offices while supplies last.

Young people are especially vulnerable

According to the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration, in 2008, of the 1,347 traffic fatalities among children ages 0 to 14 years in the U.S., about one out of every six (16 percent) involved an alcohol-impaired driver. In Oregon, between 2004 and 2008, 11 of the 19 children aged 0 to 14 killed in alcohol-involved crashes were in the car of the impaired driver.

Among drivers with blood alcohol content (BAC) levels of 0.08 % or higher involved in fatal crashes in 2008, more than one out of every 3 were between 21 and 24 years of age (34 percent). The next two largest groups were ages 25 to 34 (31 percent) and 35 to 44 (25 percent).

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Buzzed driving is drunk driving

Impaired driving isn't caused by alcohol alone. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, drugs other than alcohol (e.g., marijuana and cocaine) are involved in about 18 percent of motor vehicle driver deaths. Legal drugs, such as prescriptions and over-the-counter drugs, can also impair driving.

Be on the lookout for pedestrians

During Oregon's dark, rainy winter evenings, pedestrians are harder to see. Drivers should be especially alert in downtown shopping areas and near retail outlets. In 2009 in Oregon, the most common pedestrian errors associated with motor vehicles/pedestrian crashes were crossing between intersections; failing to yield right of way; and crossing against the signal. Pedestrians and drivers alike are reminded to follow the laws and be alert for one another.

Tips for transportation safety

ODOT officials, Oregon State Police, Oregon State Sheriff's Association, and Oregon Association Chiefs of Police also offer these safety tips:

- If you are planning to drink, plan ahead: designate a sober driver or arrange for a taxi to pick you up at a set time.
- If you are hosting a party, offer plenty of non-alcoholic beverages and help your guests be responsible. Don't let someone who has been drinking get behind the wheel.
- Take public transit to help reduce stress during the busy shopping season.
- Walking or bicycling after dark? Wear bright clothes to help you stand out, and always look both ways before crossing, even at an intersection.
- Buckle up, every trip, every time.
- Drive defensively at all times.

ODOT's travel and road conditions website, www.TripCheck.com, contains up-to-date incident information, weather reports, alerts and other valuable "know before you go" information.

Report impaired drivers by calling Oregon State Police at 1-800-24DRUNK (800-243-7865) or dialing 9-1-1.

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