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SUMMER MONTHS DEADLIEST **FOR TEEN DRIVERS**

AS 'GRADUATION SEASON' IS UPON US, A GREATER WASHINGTON GROUP URGES PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN COMBATING UNDERAGE DRINKING THIS SUMMER

McLean, VA, June 1 – Citing the fact that summer's arrival also ushers in that period (June – August) when the greatest number of U.S. teen traffic deaths occur, a Washington-metropolitan area alcohol education group has launched a parental-education initiative to combat both teen drinking and drunk driving this summer.

The McLean-based, nonprofit Washington Regional Alcohol Program (WRAP) is providing area parents of teens with "Ten Tips for a Safe Summer." WRAP's tips -- available on the organization's web site at http://www.wrap.org/files/info_tips.htm -- are designed to inform Greater Washington parents on how best to deter teen drinking during the dangerous summer months.

"There are nearly 50-percent more drunk driving deaths involving teens during the summer months than during any other time of the year," said Kurt Gregory Erickson, WRAP's President. ***"For too many parents, unfortunately, summer's unstructured time may also be a deadly time for their teenage children and their friends."***

In 2007, one-third (33%) of all traffic deaths occurring in the Greater Washington area were alcohol-related according to WRAP (and as excerpted from the organization's 16th-annual report, "How Safe are Our Roads?, A Data Report on the Impact of Drunk Driving on Highway Safety in the Washington Metropolitan Region" prepared by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and viewable online at <http://www.wrap.org/highwaysafety08.pdf>). In addition and of the area's traffic fatalities involving persons under 21 years of age, nearly 13-percent (12.8%) were alcohol-related.

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According to the American Medical Association (AMA), approximately 11 million American youth under the age of 21 drink alcohol. Nearly half of them drink to excess, consuming five or more drinks in a row, one or more times in a two week period. In addition:

- ✓ **MARYLAND**...The Maryland State Department of Education's most recently published Maryland Adolescent Survey (September 2008) reported that "many adolescents report heavy alcohol consumption" specifically citing binge drinking occurring amongst nearly half (46.9%) of Maryland's high school seniors;
- ✓ **VIRGINIA**...and in Virginia, alcohol is the "most commonly used substance" by Virginia teens as evidenced in that 76-percent of that state's high school seniors and 64-percent of the Commonwealth's 10th graders reported using alcohol according to that state's Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services' 2005 Virginia Community Youth Survey. In addition, this same survey found that more than one-quarter (27.8%) of Virginia's 12th graders reported consuming five or more drinks in a row within the reporting period's past two weeks.

WRAP's ten tips for parents to deter underage drinking and drunk driving this summer include:

- **Talk with Your Teen**...Studies time and time again have confirmed that parents can have a significant – if not most significant – impact as to whether their teens will engage in risky behaviors including the use of alcohol. Talk openly to your teen about alcohol. Create clear family rules and expectations by setting a "no alcohol" rule and supporting such an environment with "zero-tolerance" consequences if such rules are broken.
- **Provide Structure**...The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse found that teen children of "absentee parents" were four-times more likely to abuse substances than children in highly-structured homes." Find a responsible adult, neighbor, relative or friend who can look in on your child or share the responsibility for creating activities for your children. The National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign suggests you give your teens tasks (cooking dinner, doing chores, etc.) and make sure these tasks get done. In addition, most Washington-metro municipalities offer local teen-focused activities including teen centers and pool parties at nominal costs.
- **Host a Party**...Host a teen party in your own home following clearly-stated guidelines of no drugs or alcohol including: not serving beverages in easily-tampered cups but in cans or bottles; asking another parent to help chaperone; when a guest leaves, do not allow them to return; make your presence known; and if you suspect that a guest has used alcohol or drugs, contact their parents immediately.
- **Foster Self Confidence**...Instill self-confidence in your teen by talking with them about peer pressure. At some point, your teen will be offered alcohol. As the National Institutes of Health points out, "teens say they prefer quick 'one-liners' that allow them to dodge a drink without making a big scene." In addition, encourage and praise your teen for the good things they do. Participate in their lives and know what they're doing and with whom.

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- **Lay Down the Law...**The District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia all have zero tolerance laws making it a crime to possess, transport or purchase alcohol if you're under 21. In addition and in Virginia, a new law went into effect last year ensuring that teens convicted in that state and of driving after consuming virtually any amount of alcohol will lose their driver's licenses for a year and be guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor (HB 719, 2008). In Maryland, meanwhile, a new law going into effect this October both specifically outlaws the consumption of alcohol by those under 21 as well as criminalizes the act of unlawfully providing alcohol to those underage (HB 299, 2009).
- **Ensure Safety...**Even if you have every confidence in the world that your teen won't drink alcohol, if he or she is out with someone who has made the mistake of illegally drinking, don't compound it by either making a second mistake of having him or her drive under the influence or driving with an impaired driver.
- **Beware of Your Civil Liability...**In most cases, it's unlawful for parents to allow their children's friends to consume alcohol in their home. If these same "friends" are later involved in a crash, the providing parents may be responsible for injuries, property damages and wrongful death. These same parents may also face criminal charges of contributing to the delinquency of a minor.
- **Be a Role Model...**Parents, themselves, should be good role models by making sure their behavior is appropriate. Use alcohol moderately, serve as a responsible host and never drink and drive.
- **Be a Safe Boater...**Whether it's the Bay or the Potomac, this summer, don't overlook area waterways as another venue where advanced planning and safety is paramount as 50-percent of all boating deaths are alcohol-related according to the U.S. Coast Guard.
- **Don't Wait...**If you suspect that your child is drinking, intervene. Talk to your child and obtain qualified professional help if necessary. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that harsh, inconsistent discipline and hostility or rejection toward children has also been found to significantly predict adolescent drinking and alcohol-related problems. Set clear expectations and be consistent with discipline for rules not followed.

"Make no mistake about it, parents play an integral role in when and if their children drink alcohol," said Erickson. ***"These tips are simply meant to reinforce their efforts to foster a healthy and safe summer for them and their teenage children."***

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism found that young people who begin drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol addiction than those who didn't begin drinking until age 21. In addition, youth who drink alcohol participate in other risky behaviors including driving while impaired, riding in a car with a drunk driver and, via impaired judgments about sex and contraception, placing them at increased risk for HIV infection, other sexually-transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancies.

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For the 17th year in a row, WRAP recognized Greater Washington teens fighting underage drinking and drunk driving via the organization's hosting of its annual GEICO Student Awards this spring awarding four area high school student groups with plaques as well as \$500 cash awards to help sustain their efforts in promoting alcohol and drug-free lifestyles to their fellow students.

Founded in 1982, the Washington Regional Alcohol Program is an award-winning public-private partnership working to prevent drunk driving and underage drinking. Through public education, innovative health education programs and advocacy, WRAP is credited with keeping the metro-Washington area's alcohol-related traffic deaths consistently lower than the national average. WRAP, however, may best be known to area residents via the organization's popular free cab ride service for would-be drunk drivers, SoberRide. For more information, visit WRAP's web site at www.wrap.org.

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