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GOVERNOR EHRLICH ANNOUNCES 18 PERCENT DECLINE IN DRUNK DRIVING DEATHS

Checkpoint Strikeforce launched for Labor Day Weekend

ANNAPOLIS – As countless Marylanders prepare to hit the highways for the long Labor Day weekend – historically the third deadliest holiday involving impaired driving crashes – Maryland Governor Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr. launched *Checkpoint Strikeforce*, a five-month statewide campaign to stop drunk drivers and raise public awareness about impaired driving. Together with law enforcement and other partners in the fight against drunk driving, Governor Ehrlich kicked off the more than half million-dollar campaign from atop the helipad at Anne Arundel Medical Center, the unfortunate destination of many drunk-driving victims.

“Our message to drunk and impaired drivers is this: if you drink or use drugs and drive, you’ll lose,” said Governor Ehrlich. “If you don’t get the message through education, our police partners will make sure you get it through enforcement. Working together, we will make Maryland roads safer.”

Data released at the kick-off indicates that Maryland is making gains in combating drinking and driving with *Checkpoint Strikeforce* and a variety of other initiatives. In 2005, Maryland had 235 alcohol-related fatalities and 4,863 injuries in alcohol and drug-related crashes, signifying a decline in both fatalities and injuries. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration figures released this month, alcohol-related traffic fatalities decreased a total of 18-percent between 2004 and 2005 - the second largest decrease in drunk driving deaths in the nation.

In 2005, Maryland law enforcement made more than 24,200 driving under the influence (DUI) arrests and confiscated more than 14,600 licenses, according to the Maryland Automated Accident Reporting System (MAARS). Last year, more people were arrested in Maryland for drunk driving than the number of people who reside in Bel Air, Chevy Chase, Crisfield and La Plata combined. For the remainder of the year, Maryland State Police and more than 70 local law enforcement agencies will hold a minimum of one sobriety checkpoint a week across the state. With the official start of the Checkpoint Strikeforce campaign, there will be checkpoints every week in Maryland throughout the rest of the year.

(More)

“Studies conducted by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety show that sobriety checkpoints can reduce alcohol-related crashes by as much as 20 percent,” said Kurt Erickson, CEO and President of the Washington Regional Alcohol Program (WRAP). “Deploying sobriety checkpoints and patrols when and where drunk driving is most likely to occur both deters motorists from driving under the influence and arrests those who do so.”

In addition to sobriety checkpoints, *Checkpoint Strikeforce* uses radio and television ads in combination with other outreach efforts to remind Marylanders of the many dangers and consequences of impaired driving. Males between the ages of 21 and 35 are the primary target audience. This demographic group is typically harder to reach with public awareness campaigns and statistically represents the highest risk for driving under the influence. Throughout the next four and a half months ads will run in Maryland and the Washington-metro area.

Maryland drivers are seeing the difference and supporting checkpoints. A July 2006 public opinion survey of Maryland area drivers conducted for *Checkpoint Strikeforce* by MWR Strategies, found that 84 percent of drivers support the anti-DUI initiative. In fact, 73-percent of drivers are aware of sobriety checkpoints in their area while more than half of Maryland drivers (53%) perceive drunk drivers as among the most serious dangers they face on the road.

"There is no excuse for driving under the influence," Colonel Thomas E. Hutchins, Secretary of the Department of Maryland State Police said. "Last year, police in Maryland arrested an average of 66 drunk drivers a day. Each one of those drivers was a deadly threat on Maryland roads. Governor Ehrlich has directed all Maryland State Troopers to make DUI enforcement a top priority. We know the danger posed by drunk drivers and we will continue to do all we can to prevent them."

Checkpoint Strikeforce is supported locally by a grant from the Maryland State Highway Administration's Highway Safety Office to WRAP. The campaign utilizes a two-pronged approach of public education and law enforcement. The statewide efforts of *Checkpoint Strikeforce* coincide with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's national "Drunk driving. Over the Limit. Under Arrest." crackdown, which was announced on August 16th in Maryland.

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