



NEWS RELEASE

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ST. PATRICK'S DAY LEADS HOLIDAYS FOR DWI ARRESTS, PERCENTAGE OF ALCOHOL-RELATED FATALS

ST. PAUL —DWI patrols will roll out on St. Patrick's Day, the holiday period with the highest percentage of alcohol-related traffic deaths and the most DWI arrests in the last five years, according to the Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS).

Of the 20 traffic deaths on St. Patrick's Day (including the early-morning deaths on March 18) during 2004–2008, 55 percent (11) were alcohol-related. This percentage of alcohol-related deaths is far above the average annual percentage of around 35 percent. Only the 4th of July is a deadlier impaired driving period during the last five years when 23 people died and 12 (52 percent) were alcohol-related.

During 2004–2008, 1,725 motorists were arrested for DWI surrounding St. Patrick's Day. The DWI enforcement will include seat belt patrols, as 75 percent of impaired drivers killed annually are also not buckled up.

“St. Patrick's Day is a massive partying holiday and there's simply no excuse for driving impaired especially considering the safe alternatives,” says Lt. Eric Roeske of the State Patrol. “If you have plans to party, include a plan for a safe and sober ride.”

Roeske says people need to be aware of the effects of alcohol especially on day-long party events such as St. Patrick's Day. He says partiers will likely still be impaired later in the day despite breaks in drinking from the morning or afternoon and they should not risk driving under any circumstance.

Roeske recommends partiers designate a sober driver, call a cab, use public transportation or stay at the location of the party.

Each year alcohol-related crashes kill up to 200 people in Minnesota and injure 3,000, while 35,000-plus are arrested for DWI. One in eight Minnesotans have a DWI on record.

In an effort to deter impaired driving and prevent DWI offenders from being re-arrested, Governor Pawlenty is proposing legislation that would require ignition interlock devices for all DWI offenders. Interlocks are a proven technology that prevents motorists from driving impaired.

DPS notes the most dangerous periods for impaired driving can change depending on various factors, including weather or if holidays fall on weekends.



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