

STEP Enforcement Underway For Holiday

(MSC News)--It's become a part of the Thanksgiving tradition: extra patrols on Kansas Roads looking for both impaired drivers and seatbelt infractions.

Kansas Highway Patrol Trooper Don Hughes says overtime hours for law enforcement are paid through grant funds provided by the Kansas Department of Transportation. "This time of year we always do the STEP Program, and STEP is the Special Traffic Enforcement Program, which local, county, and state officers can work overtime during this period to focus on impaired of time, trying to remove them from the roadway."

The STEP campaign is underway now through Sunday, November 29th.

One of the numerous, local agencies taking part in the STEP campaign is the Hiawatha Police Department. Chief John DeFore issued the following statement regarding his agency's involvement:

The Hiawatha Police Department will join many other police agencies across the state, including the Kansas Highway Patrol, in the Kansas Thanksgiving Traffic Enforcement Campaign, from Monday, November 23, through Sunday, November 29. A grant from the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) will underwrite overtime traffic enforcement that specifically targets impaired drivers and improperly- and unrestrained vehicle occupants.

In comparison with other holidays, the Thanksgiving holiday period (Wednesday-Sunday) outranks all but New Year's in average number of crashes in which driver impairment is cited as a factor.

Those driving under the influence of alcohol or other drugs endanger not only themselves, but also others they share the road with – such as their passengers, other motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians.

On average, across Kansas, five persons are killed or injured in alcohol/drug-related crashes each day. And the crashes tend to be more severe. According to KDOT, which tracks all crashes in the state, vehicle occupants in alcohol- or other drug-related crashes are over 2 ½ times more likely to be injured or killed than those involved in crashes where alcohol or other drugs were not a factor.

Each week across Kansas, over 250 drivers are arrested for DUI (Driving Under the Influence). A DUI conviction will result in jail time, the suspension or revocation of driver's license, a fine of \$500 to \$2,500, participation in an alcohol or other drug treatment program, and the purchase and installation of an ignition interlock device in the offender's vehicle. This device requires the offender to blow into a device that measures blood alcohol concentration prior to starting the car.

Also responsible for needless death and maiming is the failure by many to simply buckle up. Twice as many Kansans who die from a crash are unrestrained as are restrained. Even worse is the fact that injuries suffered by those who are unbuckled are likely to be much more severe and disabling than injuries suffered by those who are buckled in. This applies regardless of speed, and whether the occurrence is on city street, county road, or highway.

Be sure that children are properly restrained. Sadly, across Kansas, one in every five children, ages 5-9, routinely rides in a vehicle without benefit of a child safety seat or booster. A collision at almost any speed turns unrestrained occupants into human torpedoes who are a danger to themselves and anyone they impact. Needless to say, young children are especially vulnerable. For information on child safety restraint requirements and options contact the Kansas Traffic Safety Resource Office at 1-800-416-2522 or ktsro@dccca.org.

According to Chief John DeFore, "Keep in mind that if you are going to be drinking – any amount at

all— don't consider driving home. Arrange to ride with a non-drinking acquaintance. Don't let pride or concerns for your convenience endanger your life and the lives of innocent others. Always wear your seatbelt and don't move until each person riding with you is buckled in. This is your best defense against death and injury, it's their best defense and it's the law. You will live with the consequences – good or bad – the rest of your life. It is common for a belted driver to survive a crash relatively unscathed while an unbelted passenger is killed or seriously injured – perhaps for life. By always following these simple rules, you will preserve life – maybe even yours – and certainly your cash. It will cost you if we catch you breaking the law!"

Have a Happy and Safe Thanksgiving!

Chief John DeFore

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