

Hiawatha Police to target impaired drivers

Editor's note: the following was submitted by Hiawatha Police Chief John Defore

(KNZA)--Beginning Wednesday, December 26, through Tuesday, January 1, the Hiawatha Police Department will join many other police agencies across the state, including the Kansas Highway Patrol, in the Taking Down DUI traffic enforcement campaign. This activity is sponsored by the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT).

According to KDOT, in comparison with other holidays, the New Year's period outranks most of the other holidays in number of crashes in which at least one of the drivers is impaired by alcohol and/or other drugs. These drivers endanger not only themselves, but also others they share the vehicle and road with – such as their passengers, other motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians. On average, across Kansas three persons are injured every day and one person is killed every three days in alcohol- and other drug-related crashes. Furthermore, these crashes tend to be more severe. Vehicle occupants in such 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.

Over the week following Christmas, it is projected that 250-300 drivers will be arrested for DUI (Driving Under the Influence) across the state. A DUI arrest and conviction results in jail, the suspension or permanent revocation of driver's license, a fine of \$500 to \$2,500, participation in an alcohol or other drug treatment program and, where alcohol is involved, the purchase and installation of an ignition interlock device in the offender's vehicle. This device prevents the vehicle from starting if more than a hint of alcohol is present in the driver's breath). All of this is in addition to thousands of dollars more for bail, court costs, and attorney fees.

Also responsible for needless death and maiming is the failure by many teens and adults to simply buckle up themselves, or to properly buckle up child passengers. 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 a city street, a county road, or a highway.

According to Hiawatha Police Chief John Defore, “Keep in mind that if you are going to be drinking – any amount at all – don't even 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. Drivers,

always wear your seatbelt and don't move the vehicle until each person riding with you is buckled in. This is your best defense against death and injury, it is their best defense, and it is the law. You will live with the consequences of your decisions – good or bad – for the rest of your life. By always following these simple rules, you can preserve life – maybe your life – and certainly your cash. You can safely arrive.”

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