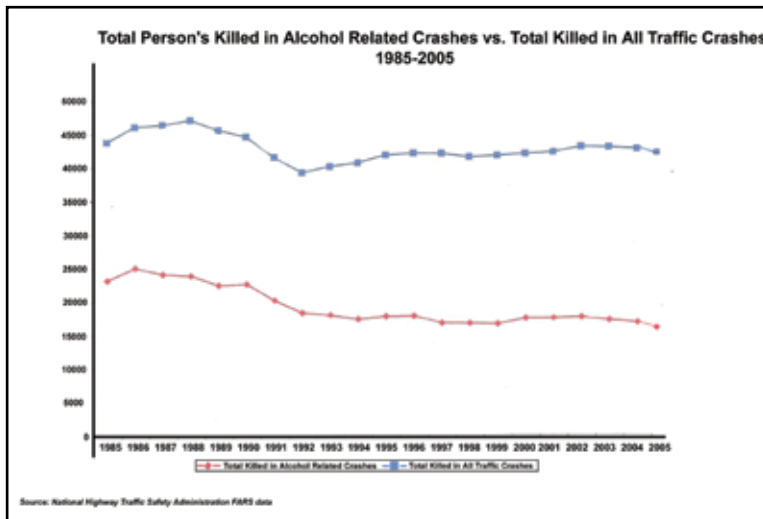




## TRAFFIC SAFETY

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## The Fight Against Impaired Driving – What's Next?

By **Brian A. Ursino**, Assistant Chief, Washington State Patrol and **Rob Mikell**, Deputy Director, Georgia Governor's Office of Highway Safety

After seeing impressive reductions in total traffic fatalities and those involving impaired driving in the late 1980's and early 1990's, data indicates that in the U.S. most states have continued to make only nominal gains, and others are losing ground in their battle to eliminate deaths and injuries caused by impaired drivers.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), in the U.S. in 2005 there were 16,885 alcohol-related fatalities, 39 percent of the total traffic fatalities for the entire year. There were 12,945 fatalities where the driver had a BAC of .08 and above. Alcohol is not the only part of the problem. Drugs are increasingly being found in chemical tests of at-fault drivers in fatal and injury crashes. Law enforcement is becoming proficient at detecting the drug impaired driver and collecting data that reflects the nature and extent of drug impairment in crashes.

In an effort to bring new reductions in drug and alcohol related crashes, government, law enforcement, non-profits, and private business interests are pulling together in an unprecedented manner. As these forces come together, joined with the support of the nation's Sheriffs, we can achieve major inroads towards reducing preventable DWI/DUI crashes.

### NSA and The Guidebook to Fight Impaired Driving

At the annual IACP Conference in September 2005, the Highway Safety Committee created an Impaired Driving Subcommittee and appointed two NSA Traffic Safety Committee members to serve on it: Sheriff George Wilhelm of Rowan County, North Carolina and Deputy Director Rob Mikell of the Georgia Governor's Office of Highway Safety. The other 18 Subcommittee members represent a diverse mix of local, provincial, and state law enforcement executives, as well as representatives from NHTSA, the Governor's Highway Safety Association (GHSA), Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), and other stakeholders.

The Subcommittee was tasked with determining how to substantially reduce impaired driving in the U.S. and Canada, along with the traffic fatalities and injuries caused by impaired driving crashes.

The Subcommittee agreed that increased success in the fight against impaired drivers lies in three key supporting areas: law enforcement leadership, criminal justice system collaboration, and effective communication strategies. After several meetings, the Subcommittee brought together its research and best practices, and reduced it all to a written strategy aimed at knocking

down the number of impaired driving fatalities.

The "Impaired Driving Guidebook: Three Keys to Renewed Focus and Success" is the culmination of the work of the Subcommittee and will be released this month. This Guidebook is for those law enforcement executives who support aggressive traffic enforcement to reduce impaired driving, but who may not know how to get started. The Guidebook can serve as a quick reference manual for building a well-rounded approach, from how to engage the media to gaining the support of local judges. The Guidebook will be available in print and on-line at the NSA website: [www.sheriffs.org](http://www.sheriffs.org).

### NSA Resolution

The NSA also took action by adopting an Impaired Driving Resolution. This resolution supports the position of NHTSA, and many others, that sustained, high-visibility enforcement is a necessary strategy in reducing impaired driving. The resolution calls upon every Sheriff's Office across the country to renew their efforts in enforcing impaired driving laws, and can be found on the NSA webpage at: [http://www.sheriffs.org/TrafficSafety/Articles/Supporting\\_Renewed\\_Efforts\\_To\\_Eliminate.pdf](http://www.sheriffs.org/TrafficSafety/Articles/Supporting_Renewed_Efforts_To_Eliminate.pdf).

While you are on the webpage, please remember to complete the traf-

fic safety study, which is being done in partnership with NHTSA, found at the bottom of the homepage. It should take less than five minutes to complete. Your responses will enhance NSA's ability to meet the needs of all Sheriffs engaged in impaired driving enforcement.

## **NHTSA's New Campaign Theme**

Research has proven that high visibility enforcement (HVE), coupled with focused media attention, results in decreased impaired driving crashes and fatalities. NHTSA has launched a new campaign called "*Drunk Driving. Over the Limit. Under Arrest.*" This campaign has been adopted because it resonates with its target audience – those at the greatest risk of driving impaired and being involved in a crash (young men age 21-34). The media coverage has been phenomenal. The intent is for this new theme to be used when stepped-up enforcement activity is being deployed. During other periods, the strong social norming themes will be deployed that communicate and encourage social responsibility year-round. The social norming messages include "Friends/Fans Don't Let Friends/Fans Drive Drunk" and "Buzzed Driving is Drunk Driving" which can be seen at: [www.stopimpaired-driving.org](http://www.stopimpaired-driving.org). Over time, combining these messages has the potential to clarify (or redefine) the term "drunk driving" and to educate the general public (and more specifically the target audience) who does not yet really understand that "impaired driving" is "drunk driving."

The U.S. Congress provided NHTSA with \$28 million for paid advertising during fiscal year 2006 to support local law enforcement activities designed to deter impaired driving and to increase safety belt usage. NHTSA will buy \$7.9 million in advertising for impaired driving enforcement activities during the December 2006 holidays. State and local offices are strongly encouraged to plan their activities to coincide with and support the national effort by NHTSA.

## **MADD Technology Summit**

MADD hosted a symposium in September that brought together researchers and innovative companies to explore current and emerging technologies to

reduce impaired driving. Technology in law enforcement, in the criminal justice system, in vehicle manufacturing, and in aftermarket industries will assist in eliminating impaired driving and the resulting deaths and injuries. Leading scientists discussed the use, scientific effectiveness, and best practices of existing technology, including ignition interlocks, passive alcohol sensors, and Secure Continuous Remote Alcohol Monitor (SCRAM) devices. Experts also revealed infrared sensing, subdural blood alcohol concentration sensing through the steering wheel, and algorithms to detect weaving.

If the driving public understands that drug and alcohol-impaired drivers stand a great chance of being apprehended, will receive swift punishment, and will be closely monitored to help reduce further offenses, then the hard-core drunk driver may recognize that the risk associated with drinking and driving is too great. All of these technologies will need the support and acceptance of the public to create a culture that no longer tolerates drinking and driving.

## **Web-based DWI/DUI Report Writing**

Several systems and applications are being tested to reduce the paperwork needed to process an impaired driving suspect. One example is the Texas Municipal Police Association's (TMPA) and NHTSA's joint pilot project called LEADRS, which stands for Law Enforcement Advanced DUI/DWI Reporting System. Initial tests show that processing time can be reduced by using a web-based report writing systems. The obvious benefit is that the office can complete a more accurate and detailed report, return to the street faster, and continue with the high visibility deterrence.

## **Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutors**

Many states are now funding Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutors (TSRP's) to serve as expert advisors for a state's traffic prosecutors, as well as a broad networking agent who can bring more attention to the importance of successful prosecution in reducing impaired driving fatalities. TSRP develops and

provides training programs with an emphasis on the impaired driving cases. They provide technical assistance and legal research on issues ranging from probable cause and Standardized Field Sobriety Testing to implied consent, breath/blood testing, and appellate court practices. TSRP's also serve an important role as a liaison between a state's Highway Safety Office and its prosecutors. Additional information on TSRP's can be found by contacting the American Prosecutors Research Institute, the National Traffic Law Center, or your state highway safety office.

## **DWI / DUI Courts**

DWI / DUI courts are part of an innovative judicial model where offenders are held accountable for their actions while receiving long-term, intensive treatment and compliance monitoring. These courts use dockets designed to manage cases of multiple offenders convicted of driving under the influence. DWI courts primarily operate within a post-conviction model, and they support MADD's recommendation that DUI/DWI courts should not be used to avoid a record of conviction and/or license sanctions.

DWI courts use professionals to comprise a "DWI Court Team," to systematically change an offender's behavior. They employ an assessment of the offender that addresses a number of bio-psychosocial domains. This process has every indication of being successful. In the University of New Mexico's evaluation of the Bernalillo County Metropolitan Court's DWI/Drug Court Program, they found a recidivism rate of only 10.6%. For more information, go to: [http://www.ndci.org/dwi\\_drug\\_court.htm](http://www.ndci.org/dwi_drug_court.htm).

## **An Alliance**

Instead of working independently toward a common goal, NSA, IACP, NHTSA, MADD, GHSA, and other key stakeholders have forged an alliance and are more closely coordinating their efforts to create a synergy to eliminate impaired driving. By working together, we can attain our ultimate common goal of zero deaths on our state, provincial, tribal, county, and local highways, streets, and roadways. ☘