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VIRGINIA: ON TRACK TO END DRUNK DRIVING

*Lieutenant Governor Bolling, State and Local Law Enforcement Appear at
Richmond International Raceway to Accelerate the Fight Against Drunk Driving*

RICHMOND INTERNATIONAL RACEWAY, VIRGINIA – Lieutenant Governor Bill Bolling joined with Virginia State Police, local law enforcement and highway safety leaders in announcing the 2012 *Checkpoint Strikeforce* campaign against drinking and driving. Amidst preparations for this weekend’s NASCAR Sprint Cup Series Federated Auto Parts 400 at Richmond International Raceway (RIR), the Lieutenant Governor highlighted the “accelerated pace” at which Virginia is fighting drunk driving.

In Virginia, the number of drunk driving fatalities has declined in each of the past four years. Last year, 245 people were killed in alcohol-related crashes, a 10.6 percent decrease from 2010. Despite the progress achieved, drunk driving still accounts for 32 percent of Virginia’s total traffic fatalities.

“The numbers show that we’ve made enormous strides, but our work is far from done,” said Lieutenant Governor Bolling. “When a person is killed in an alcohol-related crash, it’s because that person or another driver made a deadly choice. Here in Virginia, we’ve also made a choice – a choice to aggressively fight drunk driving. We’re committed to ending it for good.”

That commitment was illustrated last month when Governor Bob McDonnell signed legislation requiring ignition interlock devices for *all* persons convicted of DUI in Virginia – even first-time offenders. The goal is for these devices (which assess blood alcohol concentrations prior to starting the vehicle’s motor) to prevent repeat DUI offenses. According to the Centers for Disease Control, ignition interlock devices reduce drunk driving recidivism by 67 percent.

Started in 2002, the *Checkpoint Strikeforce* campaign is a research-based multi-state, zero-tolerance initiative designed to get impaired drivers off the roads using checkpoints and patrols and to educate the public about dangers and consequences of drunk driving.

While the *Checkpoint Strikeforce* campaign aims to reach all potential drunk drivers, they specifically focus their attention on males aged 21 to 35, a demographic that was responsible for more than 47 percent of alcohol-related crashes in 2011. The campaign utilizes TV and radio ads to target this audience across the state. This year, over 40,000 ads will run on nearly 90 broadcast stations, cable systems and radio stations in Virginia with additional ads being broadcast in northern Virginia.

In addition to a significant multimedia campaign, Virginia’s *Checkpoint Strikeforce* campaign incorporates a stepped-up law enforcement effort to promote a multijurisdictional fight against drunk driving. State and local police increase visibility through sobriety checkpoints and saturation patrols. Last year, 28,162 persons were convicted of DUI in Virginia.

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“We have zero tolerance for drinking and driving. Nearly five days a week, someone’s son or daughter dies at the hands of a drunk driver in the Commonwealth. We cannot be complacent,” warned Bolling. “If you drink and drive, you will get caught.”

MWR Strategies, a Richmond-based research firm that has conducted *Checkpoint Strikeforce* campaign surveys since 2002, conducted a public opinion survey of 807 drivers in Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia in August 2012. Among the campaign’s targeted audience, key findings include:

- The biggest fear amongst this group of local male drivers as a result of driving while intoxicated is killing or injuring someone else (66 percent), more than arrest (14 percent) or their own death (15 percent).
- Over two-thirds (69 percent) of these local drivers perceive drunk driving as one of the most serious dangers faced on area roadways.
- Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of these local drivers have witnessed suspected drunk driving and more than four-out-of-ten (44 percent) have either been stopped by the police for driving while impaired or know someone who has.
- More than one-quarter (27 percent) of these local drivers said that they would (or have) changed their behavior knowing that sobriety checkpoints were being held in their area.

By bringing their DUI prevention message to RIR, the *Checkpoint Strikeforce* campaign not only hopes to reach its target demographic but also highlight the issue in a venue which will soon see nearly 100,000 spectators, many of whom will enjoy an alcoholic beverage while watching the race.

Drive Smart Virginia is partnering with other organizations this weekend to encourage fans at RIR to sign a pledge to designate drivers.

“This weekend, eyes are on Virginia for the NASCAR Doubleheader,” said Bolling. “But we’re also part of another race – a race to save lives from a deadly behavior. On a weekend that’s all about Victory Lane, it’s important to remember that *no one* wins when it comes to drinking and driving.”

To check out this year’s Virginia *Checkpoint Strikeforce* radio and television spots, please visit: www.checkpointstrikeforce.net/resources.php

The Checkpoint Strikeforce campaign is supported by a grant from DMV: The Virginia Highway Safety Office to the nonprofit and Virginia-based Washington Regional Alcohol Program (WRAP).

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