



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 26, 2013

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CSI: DUI – Virginia Governor Examines the Science behind Virginia’s DUI Detection

Commonwealth Touts Five-Consecutive Years of Declining DUI Deaths

Richmond, VA – Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell joined Virginia State Police, local law enforcement and highway safety leaders today in a demonstration of exactly what goes into identifying and apprehending drunk drivers in the Commonwealth as part of the launch of Virginia’s 2013 *Checkpoint Strikeforce* campaign. Officers put volunteers through the paces of such enforcement elements as a standard field sobriety test, a preliminary breath test and more to showcase the techniques responsible for helping reduce Virginia’s alcohol-related fatality numbers year after year.

2012 marked the fifth-consecutive year of declining drunk driving deaths in Virginia, which are down over 35-percent since 2008 (35.31%, 354 > 229). Last year, 229 people were killed in alcohol-related crashes, a more than six-percent (6.53%) decrease from 2011. However despite the progress achieved, drunk driving still accounted for nearly 30-percent (29.54%) of Virginia’s total traffic fatalities in 2012. This year is already trending in a similar direction, with Virginia’s same number of alcohol-related traffic fatalities (144) recorded as of August 2013 as was recorded as August 2012.

“While we are very encouraged by the progress made in recent years through our law enforcement efforts, by no means have we declared victory in the battle against drunk driving,” stated Governor McDonnell. “Until the day comes when Virginians are no longer threatened by the dangers of this senseless crime, we must remain diligent in our efforts to prevent such crimes through education and enforcement.”

Linda Jackson, Director of the Virginia Department of Forensic Science, was also on hand to explain how accurate forensic alcohol testing and the expertise of scientists from her agency assist law enforcement in the investigation of suspected drunk driving. “With very few exceptions, the numbers tell the story, and yet, too many drivers tragically endanger themselves and others by driving while impaired by alcohol,” said Ms. Jackson. “Forensic testing can help prove a case of impaired driving, but only the driver can prevent it from occurring in the first place.”

Started in 2002, Virginia's *Checkpoint Strikeforce* campaign is part of a research-based multi-state, zero-tolerance initiative designed to get impaired drivers off the roads using checkpoints and patrols along with education about the dangers and consequences of driving while intoxicated. While the campaign aims to reach all potential drunk drivers, they specifically focus their attention on males aged 21 to 35, a demographic representing nearly a third (31%) of all persons killed in Virginia's alcohol-related traffic crashes last year.

In addition to a significant multimedia campaign featuring more than 40,000 campaign ads running on nearly 90 television, cable and radio stations in Virginia, *Checkpoint Strikeforce* 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, 28,719 people were convicted of DUI in Virginia, a nearly two-percent (1.98%) increase from 2011.

MWR Strategies, a Richmond-based research firm that has conducted *Checkpoint Strikeforce* campaign surveys since 2002, conducted a public opinion survey of 800 drivers in Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia in August 2013 (including an oversample of 300 area male drivers ages 21-35). Among the latter, campaign's targeted audience, key findings include:

- Drunk drivers remain one of the leading "serious dangers" facing both all age (67-percent) and 21-to-35-year old (60-percent) drivers.
- The overwhelming, most-feared drunk driving consequence of 21-to-35-year old drivers (70-percent) is the "killing or injuring someone else."
- "Stricter laws" are the leading deterrent thought by 21-to-35-year old drivers (24-percent) to be "most effective at preventing people from driving drunk."
- Over three-quarters of 21-to-35-year old drivers (76-percent) have exit strategies in place (as to how best to get safely home at the end of an evening).
- Popular means by which 21-to-35-year old drivers use "to get home safely" include: designating a driver (75-percent); sleeping at a friend's place (68-percent); taking cabs (62-percent); sticking to "bars that are walkable" (51-percent); and taking transit (49-percent).

Virginia traffic data: http://www.dmv.virginia.gov/safety/crash_data/crash_facts/crash_facts_12.pdf

For more information on *Checkpoint Strikeforce*, please visit: www.checkpointstrikeforce.net.

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

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