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## **VIRGINIA DRUNK DRIVERS: NO ONE IS ABOVE THE CONSEQUENCES**

### ***Statewide Initiative Decreases Alcohol-Related Fatalities***

**Richmond, Va.** – In the heart of Richmond’s popular bar district Shockoe Bottom, Virginia Attorney General William C. Mims joined law enforcement officers to kick off the Commonwealth’s 2009 *Checkpoint Strikeforce* campaign. As summer fun gives way to tailgates and frat parties, the anti-drunk driving initiative is back in action with stepped-up law enforcement activities, including sobriety checkpoints. Last year in Virginia, alcohol-related traffic fatalities were among the lowest in the past decade. Data issued by the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles shows a six-percent decrease in the number of alcohol-related traffic fatalities from 378 in 2007 to 354 in 2008. However, 43-percent of Virginia’s total traffic fatalities remained alcohol-related last year.

“The fact that alcohol is still a major contributing factor to Virginia’s overall traffic fatalities is a harsh reminder that we must continue to crackdown on this issue,” stated Attorney General Mims. “Drunk drivers put everyone’s life at risk. Reducing the number of alcohol-related incidents on our roads continues to be a top priority in the Commonwealth of Virginia.”

Not including Virginia State Police, local law enforcement agencies have already conducted 511 sobriety checkpoints yielding 13,800 DUI arrests to-date this year. Beginning this Labor Day weekend, state and local law enforcement will increase their efforts of enforcing traffic laws and deterring impaired driving. These efforts include at least one sobriety checkpoint and/or saturation patrol every single week in Virginia through the end of 2009.

“Nobody should ever feel the need to drive impaired,” said Lieutenant Colonel Robert Northern, Deputy Superintendent, Virginia State Police. “Law enforcement agencies across the state will be hitting the roads to target would-be drunk drivers. If you take the risk, you will get caught and the consequences are severe.”

The region-wide *Checkpoint Strikeforce* campaign combines stepped-up law enforcement efforts and proactive public education to effectively erase borders between jurisdictions in fighting drunk driving. A significant multi-media campaign, encompassing radio and television, will run nearly 34,000 ads on a total of 125 broadcast stations, cable systems and radio stations in Virginia between August and December. Additionally, targeted internet advertising is expected to garner approximately five-million impressions over the course of the campaign.

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 July 2009 for *Checkpoint Strikeforce*. Among the campaign's targeted audience of males aged 21 to 35, 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 (75-percent), more than arrest (two-percent) or their own death (ten-percent).
- Nearly three-quarters (72-percent) of these local drivers perceive drunk driving as one of the most serious dangers faced on area roadways.
- More than nine-out-of-ten (93-percent) of this group of local male drivers support the use sobriety checkpoints.
- Nearly two-out-of-five (19-percent) of these local drivers said that they would (or have) changed their behavior knowing that sobriety checkpoints were being held in their area.

In addition to the *Checkpoint Strikeforce* campaign, the Virginia Highway Safety Office encourages the use of designated drivers as a means of deterring impaired driving via its HERO Campaign for Designated Drivers ([www.drivesmartva.org](http://www.drivesmartva.org)). The statewide campaign, modeled after a New Jersey-based designated driver effort stemming from the drunk driving death of U.S. Naval Ensign John Elliott, partners the state Highway Safety Office with Drive Smart Virginia and the Virginia Hospitality and Travel Association to help us raise awareness about the importance of planning for an evening out by using a designated driver.

The *Checkpoint Strikeforce* campaign is supported by a grant from the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles' Highway Safety Office.

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Get more information at <http://www.checkpointstrikeforce.net/educate.html>, and listen to the ads at <http://www.checkpointstrikeforce.net/vadui.html>.