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WITH VIRGINIA'S LABOR DAY TRAFFIC DEATHS ON THE RISE, OFFICIALS PREPARE FOR HOLIDAY TRAVEL SAFETY

40% OF U.S. HIGHWAY FATALITIES OVER SEPTEMBER HOLIDAY INVOLVE DRUNK DRIVERS

****COMMONWEALTH LAUNCHES 15TH-ANNUAL CHECKPOINT STRIKEFORCE CAMPAIGN****

Richmond, VA, Sept. 1 – Following three consecutive Labor Day holiday periods of increasing highway deaths, Virginia officials today outlined plans to ensure safety on the Commonwealth's roadways this weekend through the year's end.

According to Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles data, Labor Day traffic fatalities on Virginia's roadways have steadily increased each year since 2012 and estimates project that close to one-million Virginians will travel this Labor Day holiday weekend with the majority of those traveling doing so by driving.

"Sadly, over the Labor Day holiday period, 40-percent of fatal crashes in the U.S. involve alcohol-impaired drivers," said Brian J. Moran, Virginia's Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security. ***"Worse, more than a fourth of these deadly crashes involve drivers with a blood alcohol concentration nearly twice the legal limit."***

Moran made his remarks at an outdoor news conference held today at the Commonwealth Public Safety Memorial in Richmond, Virginia. He was joined by officials from the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles, Virginia State Police, AAA Mid-Atlantic and the Virginia-based Washington Regional Alcohol Program.

AAA Mid-Atlantic notes that Labor Day holiday gas prices in the U.S. are projected to be the lowest since 2004 with Virginia drivers paying the fifth lowest gas prices in the nation. The average price for regular unleaded gasoline in Virginia as of August 31, 2016 was \$ 2.03 according to AAA.

The Labor Day holiday's historic increase in alcohol-impaired driving incidents also served as the backdrop in Virginia officials launching the Commonwealth's 15th-annual and statewide Checkpoint Strikeforce campaign.

(more)

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 aiming to reach all potential drunk drivers, the statewide enforcement and education campaign specifically focuses on males aged 21 to 35, a demographic representing nearly a third of all persons killed in Virginia's alcohol-related traffic crashes last year.

Nearly 200 local law enforcement agencies along with Virginia State Police area offices are participating in Virginia's 2016 Checkpoint Strikeforce campaign. In tandem with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's "Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over" enforcement mobilization, Virginia law enforcement members will be conducting approximately 140 sobriety checkpoints and 530 saturation patrols through September 5th and the Labor Day holiday period, alone. Similar local and statewide law enforcement efforts will also continue through December 31, 2016.

"Under the unifying Checkpoint Strikeforce banner, state police and our local law enforcement partners across Virginia will be deploying high visibility enforcement efforts to identify and apprehend impaired drivers," said Lt. Colonel George L. Daniels, Jr., Director of the Virginia State Police Bureau of Field Operations. ***"In as much, all drivers in or through the Commonwealth should be reminded that the penalties for even a first-time DUI conviction in Virginia are great and include mandatory ignition interlock installation on the offender's vehicle as well as fines up to \$ 2,500, suspension periods up to one year and jail sentences also up to one year."***

In addition to a significant multimedia campaign featuring approximately 35,000 campaign ads running on nearly 70 television, cable and radio stations in Virginia as well as both movie theater and digital advertising in the Commonwealth, 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, 20,768 people were convicted of DUI in Virginia.

Virginia's 30-second Checkpoint Strikeforce television spot, which celebrates the "beauty" of designated sober drivers, can be viewed online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZ2Xpa6R43U>. The TV spots, introduced last year, proactively communicate that "nothing's more beautiful than a safe ride home" whether it's in a cab, public transportation, with a sober friend or through a transportation network company such as Uber or Lyft.

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of 1,000 male drivers ages 21-35 surveyed in Virginia and Maryland between July 28th and August 9th this year admitted to either driving after having a few drinks or being driven by someone who had a few drinks even though these same respondents consider drunk drivers a "serious danger." The 2016 Checkpoint Strikeforce public opinion survey was conducted by the Washington, D.C.-based Lake Research Partners. The survey additionally found that while designating a driver was the top answer as to how 21-35 year olds "plan a safe ride home," less than two-thirds (59%) frequently plan ahead for said safe ride home.

Virginia's 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).