



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## VIRGINIA LAW ENFORCEMENT SERVES "MAKE IT TO THE TABLE" REMINDER *OVER ONE-THIRD OF U.S. HIGHWAY DEATHS OVER* *THANKSGIVING INVOLVE DRUNK DRIVERS*

**Richmond, VA, Nov. 21st** – As millions of Americans get on the roads to travel home and spend the Thanksgiving holiday reconnecting with friends and loved ones, law enforcement agencies across Virginia are serving a timely reminder: "Make It to the Table: Don't Drink and Drive this Thanksgiving Eve."

According to National Highway Traffic Safety Administration data\*, over one-third (35%) of U.S. traffic deaths over the Thanksgiving holiday period involve drunk drivers with the night before Thanksgiving being especially deadly.

"The Wednesday night before Thanksgiving has become a cultural phenomenon often called 'Thanksgiving Eve' or 'Blackout Wednesday.' It's become an evening associated with drinking and it's a big night for bars," said Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) Commissioner Richard D. Holcomb, the Governor's Highway Safety Representative. "It's especially dangerous for young people, as college students return home for the holiday and reunite with friends."

As part of the Virginia DMV's Highway Safety Office's Checkpoint Strikeforce campaign, local and state law enforcement agencies throughout Virginia continue to increase enforcement efforts this month to identify and apprehend alcohol-impaired drivers on the Commonwealth's roadways.

Between Thanksgiving and New Year's, two to three times more people die in alcohol related crashes\*, making it especially dangerous for everyone on the road. From 2005 to 2015, an average of more than 14 people have died each year on Virginia roads during the Thanksgiving period, according to the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles.

Thanksgiving is one of the biggest travel days of the year. According to the American Automobile Association, approximately 43.5 million people took a road trip for the Thanksgiving holiday in 2016 alone. Virginia law enforcement is prepared to keep drivers safe and keep drunk drivers off the roads.

Penalties for even a first-time DUI conviction in Virginia 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.

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 2017 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 are conducting high-visibility enforcement efforts including both sobriety checkpoints and saturation patrols through the remainder of the 2017 calendar year.

In addition to a significant multimedia campaign featuring approximately 37,500 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 through the current year's end, Virginia's 2017 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, 19,925 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=RDoe\\_lbw-R0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDoe_lbw-R0). The TV spots, introduced in 2015, proactively communicate "nothing's more beautiful than a safe ride home" whether it's in a cab, public transportation, with a sober friend or through transportation networks such as Uber or Lyft.

More than half (56%) of 1,000 male drivers ages 21-35 surveyed in Virginia and Maryland this month (August 15 – 25) admitted to either driving after having a few drinks or being driven by someone who had a few drinks. These 21-35 year old drivers said the main reasons they would drive after drinking or ride in a car with someone who has been drinking is because they either made a judgment call they were "sober enough" (30%) or because of impaired judgment from drinking (20%). The 2017 Checkpoint Strikeforce public opinion survey was conducted by the Washington, D.C.-based Lake Research Partners. The survey additionally found while designating a driver was the top answer as to how 21-35 year olds "plan a safe ride home," less than two-thirds (62%) frequently plan ahead for said safe ride home.

Virginia launched its 2017 Checkpoint Strikeforce campaign with Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe (D) at a pre-Labor Day weekend event held in the State Capitol in Richmond on August 31, 2017

Virginia's Checkpoint Strikeforce campaign is supported by a federal grant awarded by the DMV's Virginia Highway Safety Office to the nonprofit and Falls Church-based Washington Regional Alcohol Program (WRAP).

**\*Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, see:**

<https://www.trafficsafetymarketing.gov/get-materials/drunk-driving/buzzed-driving-drunk-driving/thanksgiving-eve-2017>

**\*Source: American Automobile Association, see:**

<https://www.scramsystems.com/images/uploads/general/content-images/holiday/infographic-drinking-duis-during-holidays.jpg>

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