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VIRGINIA LAW ENFORCEMENT

GEAR-UP FOR HALLOWEEN

NEARLY HALF OF U.S. HIGHWAY FATALITIES **ON HALLOWEEN INVOLVE DRUNK DRIVERS**

Richmond, VA, Oct. 25 – Law enforcement throughout Virginia this week are readying for a holiday statistically synonymous with drunk driving.

According to National Highway Traffic Safety Administration data*, nearly half (45%) of all U.S. traffic fatalities, on average, during Halloween between 2011 and 2015 involved a driver with a blood alcohol concentration over the legal limit of .08.

“The scary fact is that during Halloween, nearly half of U.S. traffic fatalities involve drunk drivers,” said Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) Commissioner Richard D. Holcomb.

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.

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.

“The reality is that 21-to-35 year-olds accounted for nearly two-thirds of U.S. traffic deaths on Halloween night 2015,” said Holcomb.

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. The TV spots, introduced in 2015, 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.

More than half (56%) of 1,000 male drivers ages 21-35 surveyed in Virginia and Maryland this August (8/15 – 8/25) 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 that the main reasons that they would drive after drinking or ride in a car with someone who has been drinking is because they either made a judgement call that 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 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 (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 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/drun-driving/buzzed-driving-drun-driving/halloween-buzzed-driving>

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