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DRUNK DRIVING ON THE RISE **IN WASHINGTON-METRO AREA**

AFTER A CONSECUTIVE TWO-YEAR DECLINE, NEW REPORT CITES INCREASES IN LOCAL DUI DEATHS, INJURIES & CRASHES IN 2006

Washington, D.C., Dec. 3 – Alcohol-related traffic fatalities, injuries and crashes are all back on the rise in the Washington-metropolitan area following a recent, consecutive two-year decline in the same according to a preliminary report released today by the non-profit Washington Regional Alcohol Program (WRAP).

Equally alarming was the report's findings that local DUI deaths, injuries and crashes each increased by double-digit percentages between 2005 and last year.

“These numbers are proof positive that Greater Washington’s fight against drunk driving is far from won,” said Kurt Gregory Erickson, WRAP’s President.

Today’s data is contained in WRAP’s preliminary 15th-annual report, “How Safe are Our Roads?, A Data Report on the Impact of Drunk Driving on Highway Safety in the Washington Metropolitan Region” scheduled for official release later this month. The report was prepared by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) for the McLean, Virginia-based alcohol-education group.

Findings in the 2007 report included:

- **FATALS...**Local alcohol and or drug-related traffic deaths *increased* by more than 31-percent (31.5%) between 2005 and 2006 (and from 89 to 117 such fatalities). Such follows a recent (2004 and 2005), consecutive two-year decline in such Greater Washington traffic fatalities. In addition, the number of persons killed in local alcohol and or drug-related traffic incidents last year was the highest since 2003.

- **CRASHES...**Area traffic crashes attributed to alcohol and or drugs *increased* by more than 18-percent (18.4%) between 2005 and 2006 (and from 4,495 to 5,321 such crashes).Such follows a recent (2004 and 2005), consecutive two-year decline in such Greater Washington traffic crashes. In addition, the number of local alcohol and or drug-related traffic crashes last year was the highest since 2003.
- **INJURIES...**Local alcohol and or drug-related traffic injuries *increased* by over 49-percent (49.7%) between 2005 and 2006 (and from 2,022 to 3,027 such injuries).Such follows a recent (2004 and 2005), consecutive two-year decline in such Greater Washington traffic injuries. In addition, the number of persons injured in local alcohol and or drug-related traffic incidents last year was the highest since 2003.
- **ARRESTS...**Local arrests for either driving under the influence (DUI) or driving while intoxicated (DWI) *decreased* by more than two-percent (2.5%) between 2005 and 2006 (and from 15,232 to 14,846 such arrests).Such follows a recent (2004 and 2005), consecutive two-year increase in such Greater Washington drunk driving arrests. In addition, the number of persons arrested for DUI in the Washington-metropolitan area last year (14,846) was the lowest since 2003.

Of the Washington-metropolitan area's 362 total traffic fatalities last year, 32.3-percent (117) were alcohol and or drug-related. 2006 national statistics (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration or NHTSA) cite that 41.3-percent of total U.S. vehicular fatalities were reported as alcohol / drug-related.

While WRAP and COG officials found some mixed solace in the fact that the Washington-metropolitan area continues to remain below the national average in terms of the percentage of traffic crashes involving alcohol, the same officials said that such solace is off-set by the facts that the number of lives lost locally to drunk driving in 2006 was the highest in three years.

“Ten people die each month in the Washington metropolitan region as a result of impaired driving incidents that were completely preventable,” said David Robertson, COG's executive director. ***“The fact that the monthly count also includes more than 440 alcohol-related traffic crashes and over 250 alcohol-related traffic injuries underscores the gravity of this public safety crisis.”***

“Last year's nearly 15,000 local DUI arrests averages to someone being busted for drunk driving every 35 minutes in the Greater Washington area,” said Erickson.

WRAP's timing in releasing its preliminary report is in tandem with this country's most deadly time of year when it comes to drunk driving. According to NHTSA,

historically, more people are killed in alcohol-related traffic crashes between Thanksgiving and New Years than during any other period of the year.

Founded in 1982, the Washington Regional Alcohol Program is an award-winning public-private partnership working to prevent drunk driving and underage drinking. For more information, visit **www.wrap.org**. COG (**www.mwcog.org**) is the association of 19 local governments working together for a better metropolitan region.

A preliminary version of WRAP's 2007 "How Safe are Our Roads?" report can be found as a pdf file at:

<http://www.wrap.org/highwaysafety07.pdf>

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*(WRAP's holiday free cab ride service for would-be drunk drivers, SoberRide, operates between 10:00 pm and 6:00 am each day during the period of December 7, 2007 through January 1, 2008. During these evening hours, Washington-metropolitan area residents ages 21 and older celebrating with alcohol may call the toll-free SoberRide phone number 1-800-200-TAXI and be afforded a no-cost [up to a \$ 50 fare], safe way home. AT&T wireless customers can call #-TAXI for the same service. See **www.soberride.com** for more details.)*

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