

PUBLIC INFORMATION RELEASE

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**Keith E. Hiller
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THE OWATONNA POLICE DEPARTMENT TO PUT DRUNK DRIVERS ON ICE DURING DECEMBER INCREASED DWI ENFORCEMENT

Owatonna, Minn. — Local law enforcement agencies will increase DWI patrols as part of a statewide DWI enforcement effort during December's deadly and dangerous holiday celebration period. During Minnesota Decembers, 2007–2009, there were 112 traffic deaths and 34 were alcohol-related.

In Steele County during 2007–2009, there were ten traffic deaths of which four were alcohol-related; another eight people were seriously injured in alcohol-related crashes. During this same time period 227 motorists were arrested for DWI — one in seven Minnesota drivers have a DWI on record. The local economic impact of alcohol-related fatalities and injuries was \$5,374,400.

Each year in Minnesota more than 400 people are killed on the roads and one-third of those deaths are alcohol-related. There were 141 alcohol-related deaths in 2009, a record-low. Annually more than 30,000 motorists are arrested for DWI.

The enhanced enforcement campaign is coordinated by the Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS) Office of Traffic Safety. Around 400 Minnesota law enforcement agencies will participate in the effort aimed toward taking impaired drivers off the road and encouraging motorists to make safe decisions.

“We’ll have more officers on the roads, working more hours, all focused toward arresting drivers that are putting innocent lives at risk,” says Chief Keith Hiller. “Avoid the potentially deadly consequences of driving

impaired and avoid the heavy cost, embarrassment and the shame of a DWI by planning for a safe and sober ride.”

Owatonna Officers will combine DWI patrols with seat belt enforcement. Each year, 75 percent of drinking drivers killed are also not belted. Minnesota’s primary seat belt law requires drivers and passengers in all seating positions, including the back seat, to be buckled up or in the correct child restraint. Law enforcement will stop and ticket drivers and passengers for seat belt violations.

Minnesota law states that motorists can be arrested for impaired driving even if their alcohol-concentration level is under 0.08 — the state’s legal limit — if they demonstrate impaired driving behavior. Consequences of a DWI include loss of license for up to a year, up to \$20,000 in legal costs and heightened insurance rates, and possible jail time.

Those arrested for DWI now have an option to regain their driving privileges sooner by having an interlock device installed in their vehicle. Potential participants of the Minnesota Ignition Interlock Program can learn more at www.minnesotaignitioninterlock.org. Interlock devices are installed in vehicles and require a driver to provide a breath sample in order for the vehicle to start. Safety officials say interlocks ensure DWI offenders are driving legally and safely. Interlocks will be required by law beginning in July 1, 2011, for certain DWI offenders.

Chief Keith Hiller reminds Steele County motorists to plan ahead for a safe ride home before celebrating: designate a sober driver, take a cab or public transportation, and spend the night at the location of the celebration. Chief Keith Hiller adds that families should let their loved ones know that they are willing and available to offer a safe ride at anytime if needed.

“Receiving a phone call at 3 a.m. from a family member is a lot better than receiving a knock on the door at 3 a.m. from a police officer/trooper/deputy,” says Chief Keith Hiller.

The DWI enforcement and education effort is funded by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and is a component of the state’s *Toward Zero Deaths (TZD)* traffic safety program. *TZD* is the state’s core traffic safety program that uses a multidisciplinary approach to address traffic issues regionally through enforcement, education, engineering and emergency trauma care.



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