

# **PUBLIC INFORMATION RELEASE**

**Owatonna Police Department  
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## **For Release Immediately**

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## **LAW ENFORCEMENT ON THE LOOK OUT FOR IMPAIRED DRIVERS DURING UPCOMING DWI ENFORCMENT EFFORT**

Owatonna, Minn. — The Owatonna Police Department, Steele County Sheriff's Office, the Blooming Prairie Police Department and the Minnesota State Patrol will be cracking down on impaired drivers as part of a statewide DWI enforcement effort, August 21–Sept. 7. The effort is coordinated by the Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS). 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.

Officers/Deputies/Troopers will combine DWI patrols with seat belt enforcement — as of June 9, Minnesota has a primary seat belt law that requires drivers and passengers in all seating positions — including the back seat — to be buckled up or in the correct child restraint. Law enforcement can stop motorists solely for seat belt violations, including unbelted passengers.

DPS reports enhanced DWI enforcement campaigns factored in the state tallying a record-low number of alcohol-related deaths in 2008. Last year, 163 motorists were killed in alcohol-related crashes — one in Steele County. Despite the drop in deaths, DPS reports alcohol-related crashes still accounted for more than one-third of all deaths — typical for each year. In the last three years, 2006–2008, 519 motorists were killed and another 1,159 motorists were seriously injured in alcohol-related crashes statewide. During that same time period 116,515 motorists were arrested for DWI — 35,736 in 2008. In Steele County during 2006–2008, there were five impaired driving deaths, six serious injuries and 746 DWI violations issued. The local economic impact of alcohol-related fatalities was \$5,850,000.

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“Impaired drivers are an unnecessary added risk to motorists on Steele County roads,” says Sheriff Gary Ringhofer. “That is why law enforcement will be on the lookout for drivers who display common impaired driving characteristics — swerving, driving erratically, or driving too slow for traffic.”

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. The consequences of a DWI can vary depending on many factors including alcohol-concentration, previous offenses and if there was an injury related to a crash. A first-time DWI offense will trigger an automatic driver’s license revocation for a minimum of 90 days. The cost of a DWI can reach \$20,000 when factoring legal, court and other administrative fees.

Those arrested for DWI now have an option to start driving sooner by having an interlock device installed in their vehicle to regain their driving privileges. Potential participants of the Minnesota Ignition Interlock Program can learn more at [www.dps.state.mn.us/ots](http://www.dps.state.mn.us/ots). Safety officials say this program ensures DWI offenders are driving legally and safely.

Sheriff Gary Ringhofer reminds Steele County motorists, especially young adults, to plan ahead for a safe ride home before celebrating. Young people continue to be the primary violators when it comes to impaired driving offenses. Statewide from 2006–2008, more than 36,000 motorists 24 years of age and younger were arrested for DWI. In Steele County 198 motorists arrested for DWI were age 24 and younger — including 60 under the legal drinking age.

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

**Drunk Driving — Over the Limit. Under Arrest.**

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