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A weekly Q&A
with the Owatonna
Police Department

Submit your question to news@owatonna.com or 444-2379

Q: Why does the Owatonna Police Department focus so much on traffic infractions, especially driving while impaired (DWI or DUI)?

A: Every Law Enforcement officer takes an oath to "Protect and Serve." Officers focus on traffic laws to protect the public from a possible crash and/or injuries due to individuals not obeying the traffic laws. Vehicles are also stopped to protect the driver from themselves. When drivers fail to obey laws, they are not protecting themselves, their passengers and/or any other citizen on the roadway.

We focus on impaired drivers as they have the most significant impact on a community. In Minnesota, over 500,395 motorists have a DWI record. A DWI can cost up to \$20,000 when factoring in increased insurance cost rates, legal and other fees. The Department of Public Safety reports that of all alcohol-related drivers killed in 2006, nearly 70 percent were not wearing seat belts.

In 2006, the Department of Public Safety tallied a record-low number of alcohol-related traffic deaths – 166 – yet a record-high 41,832 motorists were arrested for DWI. In Steele County during 2004-2006, there were two impaired driving deaths and 770 DWI arrests. The local economic impact of alcohol-related fatalities was \$2,300,000. Impaired driving is still public enemy number-one when it comes to traffic safety. With traffic deaths on the rise in 2007, it's the role of our agency to stop impaired driving, and it's the role of every motorist to make smart decisions before getting behind the wheel. The Owatonna Police Department will gift-wrap safe roads to Owatonna residents during a statewide impaired driving enforcement campaign that runs throughout December.

Sgt. Deanne von Wald
Owatonna Police Department