

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Mardi Gras is among Louisiana's deadliest holidays for crashes**

BATON ROUGE – Carnival season in Louisiana is well known for its music, food, beads, partying and parades. However, safety officials are warning motorists that Mardi Gras consistently ranks as one of the most dangerous holidays in Louisiana in terms of highway deaths and injuries.

Preliminary statistics for 2009 show that 22 people were killed and 1,017 were injured in crashes over the Mardi Gras holiday period—by far the deadliest of the eight holidays for which statistics are compiled. Thirteen of the 22 deaths last year were alcohol-related. In 2008, there were 611 crashes during the Mardi Gras holiday in which 16 people were killed and 988 were injured. Eleven of those 16 killed were involved in alcohol-related crashes.

These substantially high numbers have led to strengthened warnings from safety officials.

“Perhaps more than any other holiday in Louisiana, Mardi Gras is associated with high levels of partying in which alcohol is consumed,” said Lt. Col. John Leblanc, executive director of the Louisiana Highway Safety Commission. “In an effort to save lives and reduce the number of injuries, the Louisiana Highway Safety Commission provides grants to law enforcement agencies across the state to conduct additional patrols and sobriety check points during Mardi Gras and other holiday periods.”

Mardi Gras day falls on Feb. 16 this year but the celebrations begin with the first parades earlier in the month. The holiday period for counting highway traffic incidents begins on the Friday prior to Mardi Gras.

“Ten people were injured or killed in traffic crashes during every hour of last year’s long Mardi Gras weekend,” LeBlanc said. “This is a terrible statistic, which we intend to improve through increased education and enforcement.”

LeBlanc reminds motorists that over the past few years Louisiana has substantially increased penalties for drivers arrested and convicted of drunk driving. Most recently, the Legislature passed a law imposing 15-day jail sentences for people caught driving while their licenses are suspended for a previous DWI. Additional measures passed by the Legislature include one-year license suspensions for suspects who refuse to take a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) test and installation of ignition interlock devices in vehicles of many drivers arrested on DWI charges.

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