

NEWS RELEASE

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Enforcement agencies plan July 4 crackdown on drunk drivers and boaters

BATON ROUGE – Law enforcement officers across Louisiana will be out in full force over the Fourth of July holiday making roads safer for travelers through a crackdown on drunk drivers on state roadways and waterways.

“Because the Fourth of July holiday falls on a Monday this year, we can expect a longer period during which people make poor choices about drinking then driving motor vehicles on our streets and highways, as well as operating boats on our lakes, rivers and bayous,” said Lt. Col. John LeBlanc, executive director of the Louisiana Highway Commission. “Those impaired motorists and boat operators endanger lives and need to be kept from turning such a revered holiday into a tragedy.”

In 2008, when the Fourth of July was also a three-day holiday, six of the eight people killed on Louisiana roads were involved in alcohol-related crashes. That holiday also resulted in 618 crash injuries, of which 123 were alcohol-related.

The Louisiana Highway Safety Commission provides grants to city police departments, sheriffs’ offices and state police to fund increased enforcement statewide during holiday periods, such as the Fourth of July.

Col. Michael Edmonson, State Police Superintendent, said that state troopers are committed to getting drunk drivers off the road.

“We will use every resource to locate and arrest those drivers who choose to drink and drive,” Edmonson said. “Prevention is the key to reducing alcohol-related crashes on our highways. It’s a commitment that’s shared by every law enforcement agency in the state.”

In addition to increased enforcement on highways, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries agents will be patrolling popular boating areas looking for impaired boat operators, who are subject to the same DWI laws that apply to motorists. Louisiana had

32 deaths from boating crash incidents in 2009, with alcohol being a leading factor in many of those fatalities.

According to Lt. Col. Jeff Mayne of LDWF's Enforcement Division, his agents have zero tolerance for anyone operating a watercraft under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

"Whether you are driving a vehicle or operating a boat, the same DWI laws and penalties apply," Mayne said. "We want everybody to have a good time on the water during the Fourth of July holiday weekend, but we want them to do it in a safe manner by wearing life jackets and making sure to have a designated operator of the vessel."

On the state's roadways, alcohol-related crashes during the Fourth of July holiday last year totaled 252, leaving one person dead and 64 injured. That is an improvement over the 2008 holiday when six deaths and 124 injuries were attributed to driver alcohol use.

LeBlanc urged motorists to take precautions during the holiday period to make travel safer for all motorists:

- Before attending any celebration, plan a safe way home
- Before drinking, designate a sober driver and give that person your keys
- If you are impaired, call a taxi, sober friend or family member.
- If you see a suspected drunk driver, contact your local police or sheriff's department, or call the Louisiana State Police hotline: *LSP (*577)

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