

Sustained Enforcement: Continuing the Fight Against Impaired Driving

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Sadly, impaired driving continues to be one of our nation's greatest and most persistent threats to public safety. In 2007, there were 41,059 traffic related fatalities. While the number of fatalities has been reduced from the level in 2006, alcohol is still a factor in approximately 37% of those fatalities. Regrettably, that percentage remains constant from 2006. The epidemic continues, and our call to combat impaired driving must continue unabated, as well.

The Division of State Associations of Chiefs of Police (SACOP) of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) has fully supported and advocated strong leadership among law enforcement executives to ensure that committed traffic enforcement is successful. Sustained enforcement of impaired driving laws demonstrates an agency's commitment to the safety of the citizens they serve. It is critical that law enforcement leaders implement and prioritize activities aimed at reducing incidents of impaired driving and related crashes that can result in fatalities and disabling injuries. A clear and consistent message of support and encouragement for strengthened enforcement initiatives is required.

SACOP is engaged in partnership with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to bring you the information you need to implement effective, consistent, sustained enforcement in combating impaired driving. The Division publishes the *Sustained Impaired Driving Enforcement* newsletter which can assist you in this task, with many resources and initiatives for your consideration. This newsletter can be found on the IACP Web Site at <http://www.theiacp.org>. And, through NHTSA, we have also been able to provide your state association with funds to promote the implementation of consistent enforcement. Please check with your association's executive director for more information on that assistance and planned activities.

As we approach one of the deadliest holiday periods for motor vehicle drivers and passengers, the leadership of our police chiefs and sheriffs becomes even more pressing. The Fourth of July holiday and the summer months are particularly dangerous times on the roads because of increased incidents of impaired driving. The *4th of July – Independence Day Impaired Driving Prevention Campaign* is designed to help you implement high visibility enforcement. The campaign runs from June 21-July 5, 2009.

We also encourage all law enforcement agencies to participate in the *Impaired Driving National Enforcement Crackdown* campaign from August 21 – September 7. This campaign covers the Labor Day weekend, another deadly time on our nation's highways and byways. There is a great deal of material available for both campaigns at <http://www.stopimpaireddriving.org/planners/July4th09/>. Plan now for stepped-up

enforcement, and begin getting the word out that impaired drivers will be arrested to make your roadways safer.

Florida has experienced some success in reducing fatality numbers in alcohol-impaired driving crashes. From 2006-2007, the state experienced a 3.9% decrease in these fatalities. The decrease clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of consistent leadership and outreach efforts among the state's law enforcement leaders.

Clear and consistent leadership is key to increasing our efforts to eliminate impaired driving. As law enforcement leaders, we must deliver a strong message of support and encouragement for strengthened enforcement initiatives. We must ensure that traffic law enforcement is viewed among both the law enforcement community and the public as "real police work." As we deal with increased demands at the same time we are faced with staffing and funding challenges, we must continually motivate our officers through clear direction of the need to prioritize traffic law enforcement.

Why? In addition to the potential to significantly reduce impaired driving and related crashes, there is unlimited potential for another positive consequence—crime reduction.

Traffic enforcement has already proven to be an effective means of crime prevention by interdicting criminal behavior and terrorism before crimes are committed. The theories contained in "Fixing Broken Windows," which proved highly successful in reducing crimes and improving quality of life, are easily transferable to traffic law enforcement.

More citizens formally encounter law enforcement through traffic stops than by any other means. The Bureau of Justice Statistics reported in 2002 that almost 17 million citizens encounter law enforcement officers during traffic stops or investigations. This represented approximately 40% of all officer-civilian contacts. By prioritizing traffic law enforcement, we will not only curtail impaired driving, we will reduce crime overall.

Fortunately, this is a strategy that finds great support from our citizens. According to the Gallup Organization NHTSA 2003 survey, nearly 97 percent of Americans view impaired driving as a threat to the community. The majority of Americans consider impaired driving one of our Nation's more important social issues and support increased use of enforcement efforts, such as saturation patrols and sobriety checkpoints, to protect innocent victims.

But, law enforcement, like politics, is local. So, how do we sell sustained impaired enforcement to our officers and communities? Thankfully, it largely sells itself if the target audience is made aware of it. Garnering the support and response of officers and the public requires leadership, which begins with awareness and commitment at the highest level of any organization. Motivating officers to accept and become actively involved with impaired driving enforcement should be one of the focal points of a progressive traffic enforcement program. This motivation begins with the chief, sheriff, or other department head and must be conveyed from the top down throughout all levels of the organization.

We, as the leaders of our agencies, need to revisit our policies and goals regarding impaired driving. We must ensure that sustained enforcement of impaired driving laws is an agency priority. Whether through low-staffing sobriety checkpoints, saturation patrols, or participation in crackdown efforts, we must renew our collective efforts to significantly reduce impaired driving.

We must provide officers with the time, training, and tools required to perform their jobs as effectively as possible. We need to pursue funding sources outside the federal government to support the training and equipment required to do the job. Civic groups and local companies can be powerful partners in your efforts.

Strong support and active participation from various segments of the private sector are critical to achieving significant reductions in impaired driving and related crashes. We must actively seek their support and participation. Support should be sought from traditional and nontraditional partners, including advocacy groups, insurance carriers, automotive and motorcycle dealerships, and other local businesses. All of these groups can provide valuable assistance in your efforts.

Law enforcement executives who seek public support for their enforcement efforts may also compile local statistics of the cost in life and property to their community. When citizens are made aware of the personal costs to them in human life and injury, along with monetary loss through medical expenses and property damage, they are likely to support your efforts.

There are many strategies that can and should be deployed in the fight against impaired driving, most notably sustained high visibility enforcement. Research has shown that strong and effective laws – combined with highly visible enforcement – reduce not only impaired driving, but other crimes, too. The Florida Police Chiefs Association, the IACP, and SACOP all stand behind your efforts and can provide you with tools and support to help. By banding together with one voice, we can continue to effect great change and continue to reduce the number of alcohol-impaired driving fatalities and injuries.