



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Motorists urged to make this a safe, sober and alert holiday season

Georgia law enforcement will continue their zero tolerance for DUI by taking all impaired drivers straight to jail

(ATLANTA) The Governor's Office of Highway Safety and the Georgia Department of Public Safety are asking drivers to put safety at the top of their list this holiday season when they are on the road during what is expected to be the most heavily traveled Christmas holiday period ever in the United States.

With predictions of more than 102 million people traveling on our nation's roads during Christmas and New Year's, state and local law enforcement are reminding all drivers to be patient, make sure everyone in their vehicle is wearing a seat belt and ensure all children under the age of eight are riding in an approved child passenger safety seat or booster seat.

"With so many people expected to be on the road for the long holiday weekend, we ask everyone to make sure they are rested for their trip because drowsy driving is just as dangerous as drunk driving," GOHS Director Harris Blackwood said. "Watch your speed, put down your phone and pay attention to the road so you can safely get where you are going. All we want is for everyone to get there and get back home safely on every trip."

The Georgia State Patrol and local law enforcement won't be taking a holiday during the Christmas and New Year's travel periods, when one of their top priorities will be taking drunk drivers off the road and to jail.

According to the Georgia Department of Transportation, there were 24 alcohol-related traffic fatalities statewide in December of 2017 and over the last five years, there have been on an average of 300 alcohol-related traffic deaths in the United States from Christmas to New Year's Day.

"There should be no surprise that the Georgia State Patrol, particularly during the holiday season, is going to push DUI enforcement," Georgia Department of Public Safety Commissioner Colonel Mark McDonough said. "Plan ahead because we don't want anybody harmed by driving under the influence and we don't want anybody's holiday to become a

tragedy."

"It happens every year that someone has one too many," Blackwood said. "If you wait until the second drink touches your lips, you have waited too long. You need to make your plans for a sober ride home before you arrive at your party or event."

AAA's "Tow-To-Go" program is an option for those who fail to plan ahead for a sober ride home. The "Tow-To-Go" service will once again offer free tows and rides up to 10 miles from Friday, December 21 until 6:00 a.m. on Wednesday, January 2, 2018. Those interested in the free ride can visit https://autoclubsouth.aaa.com/safety/tow_to_go.aspx or call (855) 2-TOW-2-GO for more information during the Christmas/New Year's holiday travel period.

The Governor's Office of Highway Safety also offers these tips for all drivers who are going to be on the road during the end-of-year holiday travel period:

- Leave earlier for your destination because the extra traffic on the road may increase travel times.
- Don't try to make up time by speeding.
- Make sure everyone in your vehicle is wearing their seat belts and all children under 8 are riding in an approved child passenger safety seat or booster seat.
- Limit driver distractions by staying off phones. Find a safe place to pull off the road if you need to speak to someone or check your navigation.
- Plan rest stops as needed and alternate drivers if possible.

For more information on GOHS' impaired driving awareness programs, visit <https://www.gahighwaysafety.org>. Follow GOHS on social media at www.facebook.com/gahighwayafety, @gohsgeorgia on Twitter and Instagram or GOHSGEORGIA on YouTube.

Media outlets can find broadcast interview clips with Director Blackwood and Col. McDonough, video and still photos at the following link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/s8c840dsupldcg9/Christmas%20holiday%2018%20video%20feed.mpg?dl=0>.

Please note the elements in the feed are designed for media outlets to use at their editorial discretion. We welcome any comments about what our office can provide to assist in your coverage of highway safety at robert.hydrick@gohs.ga.gov.

We thank you for your coverage of highway safety in 2018 and look forward to working with you in 2019.

Director Blackwood

Cut 1: "We know a lot of people are going to be leaving on Friday to try to get somewhere for this long, extended weekend we have. Do the first thing and make sure you are ready. Make sure you have had enough sleep because driving drowsy is just as dangerous as driving drunk. We want you to make sure everybody is buckled up in every seat and that includes children under the age of eight years old in a proper child passenger safety seat. Watch your speed. Put down the phone. If you have got someone else with a phone, let them text for you. We went a long time in this country before we had messages every ten minutes. Put down the phone, pay attention to the road, get there safely and get home safely. That is what we are asking for this year."

Cut 2: "We want you to enjoy your time with family. When you are behind the wheel of that car, your number one responsibility is that car. It is two tons of steel. When handled properly, it is one wonderful thing. When it is not handled

properly, it is a lethal weapon. Ladies and gentlemen, we need you to help us this weekend and throughout this holiday season to make sure this is a safe time for all who use the roads here in Georgia. There are going to be a lot of people coming to here and through here. Please be careful. Please buckle up and please pay attention to that road."

Cut 3: "If you are going to a Christmas party or a New Year's party, you know what you are going to wear, you know where you're going and you know what route you are going most of the time. You know all of these things but do you know how you are going to get home. That is the most important thing. How are you going to get home safely if you have had a couple of drinks too many? Call a ride service. Call a taxi. If you have to call a taxi from another town, it will be less than a DUI. A DUI in Georgia will cost you around \$10,000. If you have got \$10,000 to blow, more power to you but you are going to endanger your life and the lives of others by getting on the road by drinking and driving."

Col. McDonough

Cut 1: "I think the biggest thing we need to have in the rush of the holiday season is perspective. Take a deep breath. Try to take the rush out of it and try to enjoy the things around you without getting frustrated. If you get in that circumstance where anger plays into it that is not the right emotion behind the wheel of a car. Give yourself a lot of extra time. Take perspective and take things as they come. Enjoy the things going on around you instead of getting pushed by the hustle and bustle."

Cut 2: "So we have a weekend heading into Christmas Eve and Christmas. So for a five-day period of time, there is going to be a lot of traveling around and last minute shopping. The message is very simple. The first thing you can do is seat belt yourself safely in the car. If there are car seats or booster seats, make sure the kids are properly restrained. Before you every turn that ignition, the one thing you can do is make sure everybody is properly belted in that vehicle."

Cut 3: "We are so connected to that iPad. That cellphone. It is a conditioned response. Whether you are using it for navigation or whether you are communicating or whether you are look up what store has what sale, you have to realize that when you are in a vehicle, that thing cannot be in your hand. That is kind of stuff you should to leave to prior planning. To insure that you get all those things done before hit the road because once you get behind the wheel of the car, your attention should be on the roadway. That is where your eyes should be. Your hands should be on the wheel. It shouldn't be under the influence of an electronic device. Yes, we are going to be enforcing that law as strictly as we enforce DUI because studies have shown that diverted attention, that divided attention can be as hazardous as driving under the influence. You can expect us to have that zero tolerance for the use of your cellphone."

Cut 4: "The goal is to make the roadways as safe as possible. If we come across somebody who is under the influence, they are going to jail. There is a zero tolerance aspect. It doesn't matter who you are because you are going to get locked up. With that your car is going to be impounded and you are going to be spending a significant amount of time before they allow you to bail out. So it is going to ruin your holiday. So why place yourself in the circumstance to ruin your holiday. And then it could potentially jeopardize not only our holiday, but your career because a conviction of a DUI is a serious thing. It could prevent you from getting a future job. Don't even go there. There is no reason to go there. Care about yourself. People care about you. Take the steps to not get behind the wheel under the influence."

(END RELEASE)