



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Motorists Reminded to Save Their Green by Not Driving Drunk

Georgia law enforcement will be stepping up St. Patrick's Day DUI enforcement

(ATLANTA) - Drivers will see plenty of green leaving their wallets if they make the foolish and illegal decision to drink and drive while celebrating St. Patrick's Day.

The Governor's Office of Highway Safety is joining the Safe and Sober Driving Coalition TEAM Georgia, the Georgia Department of Public Safety and the Georgia Department of Transportation to encourage everyone to plan ahead for a sober ride if their St. Patrick's celebration is going to include alcohol.

The Georgia State Patrol and local law enforcement officers statewide will keep their zero tolerance policy by taking all drunk and drugged drivers they find on the road to jail this weekend and every day of the year.

"TEAM Georgia is committed to its mission of encouraging safe and sober driving choices as a means of reducing transportation crashes, injuries and deaths," TEAM Georgia Chairman Ron Fennel said. "Our St. Patrick's Day campaign brings together members of the hospitality industry, restaurants and bars to stand behind a unified message for everyone to have fun but to also be responsible and get home safely."

According to the National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration, the number of alcohol-related traffic deaths in Georgia has increased by 32 percent in just two years. There were 368 alcohol-related traffic deaths in Georgia in 2016 compared to 279 in 2014.

Preliminary data from the Georgia Department of Transportation shows 17 people died, and almost 1,600 were injured in more than 4700 crashes on Georgia roadways from March 16-19 last year.

The Georgia Department of Public Safety, which includes the Georgia State Patrol, Capitol Police and the Motor Carrier Compliance Division, made 201 DUI arrests in Georgia over a three-day period during last year's St. Patrick's Day weekend.

With St. Patrick's Day falling on Saturday this year, law enforcement will be increasing efforts to take all impaired drivers off the road.

"The luck of the Irish will not save you if you make the foolish decision to break the law by getting behind the wheel when you are too impaired to drive," Governor's Office of Highway Safety Director Harris Blackwood said. "When you are planning your celebration for this weekend, go ahead and plan ahead for a sober ride with a designated driver or ridesharing service. A little planning now can save you plenty of headaches and maybe even your life."

In addition to designated drivers and ridesharing services, drivers in Georgia can get a free tow and ride home up to ten miles from AAA's Tow-To-Go service. The free tow and rides from AAA's Tow-To-Go will begin on Friday and end at 6:00 a.m. on Sunday, March 18.

TEAM Georgia partner and sponsor Checker Cab of Atlanta will also provide free rides home from 6 p.m. on March 16 to 6 a.m. on March 18.

For more information on how you can join TEAM Georgia's efforts to promote safe and sober driving, call 770-490-1243 or visit their website www.teamgeorgia.net.

More information on the Governor's Office of Highway Safety can be found at our Facebook page Georgia GOHS, on Twitter @gohsgeorgia and on our website www.gahighwaysafety.org.

Broadcast media outlets outside Atlanta can find video cuts from today's news conference and photos for digital print outlets at the following link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/sp8n8ec5ulk39a3/TEAM%20Georgia%20St.%20Patricks%20Day%20DUI%20Prevention.mp4?dl=0>

Video comments:

Governor's Office of Highway Safety Deputy Director Jim Andrews:

"We understand that St. Patrick's Day is an occasion that many adults chose to celebrate by drinking alcohol. But if you do, don't get behind the wheel of a vehicle. When you are making your plans this week for what you are going to do this weekend, make sure those plans include a sober driver. Whether it is a designated driver, friend, ride service like UBER, Lyft or taxi cab, or AAA's Tow-To-Go, you have options that make sure you and everyone will get home safely."

Sgt. John Cronin- Georgia State Patrol DUI Nighthawks Metro Atlanta Post Commander:

"If you don't heed the warning that all of us up here are asking you to do and if you don't plan, the State Patrol and other local agencies will be on the roads to reinforce what we are telling you today. Whether it is rainy or clear, we will be out there. We will be conducting vehicle stops and we will be taking you to jail. Your weekend will end in the jail and we are doing that to keep your life from ending on the roadways."

GDOT Director of Operations John Hibbard:

"The focus is on individual responsibility. How behavioral changes can significantly reduce fatalities for motorists, pedestrians motorcyclists and bicyclists. "Drive Alert, Arrive Alive" also calls attention to the startling surge in people dying in single vehicle collisions. Many of these crashes are preventable. Driver behavior- distracted driving, impaired driving, driving too fast for conditions, failure to wear a seat belt- contributes to a majority of the state's fatalities."

TEAM Georgia Chairman Ron Fennel:

"You have some simple ways as motorists to have a safe holiday. First of all select a designated driver. Make sure everybody gets home. You can do that before you get started. Draw straws. Make a bet. Lose a bet. I have done that. Whatever it is designate a driver. Pass the keys on to a sober driver in the equation should you find yourselves over-indulged."

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