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Wolf Administration, Safety Partners Urge Designated Driving Ahead of Labor Day Holiday

Harrisburg, PA – The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT); Jennifer Smith, acting secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs; Geisinger Holy Spirit Hospital; Cumberland County District Attorney David Freed; Cumberland County Coroner Charles Hall; Sgt. Richard Gamez, Drug Recognition Expert at the Pennsylvania State Police; and C. Stephen Erni, executive director of the Pennsylvania DUI Association today held a media event to highlight the dangers of impaired driving and urge drivers to celebrate responsibly ahead of the Labor Day holiday.

“Although DUI-related fatalities have fallen in recent times, drug-related crashes are on the rise,” PennDOT Secretary Leslie S. Richards said of the event’s importance. “Through the collaboration, education, and enforcement efforts of these partners, we look to decrease crashes and fatalities this weekend and beyond.”

According to the Pennsylvania State Police, during last year’s Labor Day weekend, there were more than 2,800 total crashes in Pennsylvania; 281 of those were alcohol-related that resulted in 13 fatalities. Of the total crashes, 106 were drug-related, resulting in two fatalities.

“Many impaired drivers today are mixing drugs, either prescription or illicit, and could be using them in combination with alcohol, which is a very dangerous and often deadly combination,” said Jennifer Smith, acting secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs. “We want to be sure people recognize the danger of drinking alcohol, using any kind of prescription or illicit drugs, and driving. Be safe and consider the safety of others.”

As part of the national impaired driving enforcement mobilization, which runs from August 15 through September 4, Pennsylvania’s DUI task forces, the Pennsylvania State Police, and local law enforcement statewide will conduct checkpoints and roving patrols as part of the crackdown.

The legal blood-alcohol content in Pennsylvania is 0.08 for motorists 21 years of age and over. Driving under the influence penalties may include jail time, license suspension, and fines of between \$500 and \$5,000.

“The consequences of driving while impaired not only affect the individual impacted, but entire families and communities as a whole,” says Dale Dangleben, M.D., FACS, trauma program medical director at Geisinger Holy Spirit. “Serious and life-threatening traumatic injuries caused by those driving under the influence can be prevented by simply not getting behind the wheel while impaired. Whether the person is a chronic alcohol abuser or a casual drinker, they may think they aren’t impaired. That isn’t the case. Alcohol consumption causes slowed reactions, reduced coordination and poor judgment.”

As part of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration’s (NHTSA) effort to decrease impaired driving, they developed the SaferRide smartphone app. The app can be used to quickly pinpoint the user’s location and call a taxi or trusted friend for a safe ride home. SaferRide is free and available for Android and Apple devices.

For more information on PennDOT’s impaired driving efforts, visit PennDOT.gov/safety.

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