



*Applied Research for Community Health & Safety*

## NEWS RELEASE

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# **The cost can be staggering, but many will still drink and drive during the holidays.**

Drinking and driving has always been an expensive proposition; first and foremost because of the tragic consequence that often accompany a motor vehicle crash. But even if this kind of incident is avoided, the ill-advised decision to drive while under the influence of alcohol (DUI) can come with a hefty price tag, one so large it might make the cost of a holiday shopping spree pale in comparison.

“People just don’t know the consequences,” said Katherine Bolter, Program Director for the Jackson-Bibby Awareness Group, a company that provides counseling services for DUI offenders.

First of all, the cost of automobile insurance can skyrocket, with thousands of dollars added to the bill. Court cost can also be substantial, especially if a lawyer is retained. Then there is the fee the DUI Offender program, which is mandated by the court for all those arrested for drinking and driving. Such costs can run as high as \$1000, even for a first-time offender.

The costs of such program are set by the Stat of California and the Department of Motor Vehicles, and in 2008 those fees are scheduled to go up across the board, topping out at \$1,469 for the Multiple Offender program, an 18-month long series of educational and counseling sessions.

“The increase is long overdue,” said Bolter. “In San Bernardino there has been only one increase in the last 15 years, and everything else is going up: rents, health insurance, worker’s compensation, and the lost of labor, which can be high since all DUI counselors have to be certified by the state.” And because there is no public funding for these program, it all comes out of the pocket of the client, the DUI offender.

But the costs of drinking and driving are more than just monetary. According to Donna Dobbs, Director of programs for Hase & Associates Systems, another DUI Program provider, they can include a far wider range of consequences, impacting the individual’s family and social life.



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“Jobs are often lost, if the person needs a driver’s license or security clearance to work,” she said. “After that, things are likely to snowball, with loss of car, home, and even family.”

Not a pleasant prospect for the holiday season, but for those whose end-of-the-year celebrations include the consumption of alcohol, they should know that law enforcement agencies will be out in force, conducting special DUI saturation patrols and sobriety checkpoints, all intended to get intoxicated drivers off the road and into a DUI program where they can get needed counseling.

Known as "Operation Safe Holidays," these operations include police from several municipalities, the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department, and the California Highway patrol. Together these agencies, along with business and community-based organizations, make up the San Bernardino DUI Task Force, a group dedicated to making the highways as safe as possible, especially during the holidays when drinking and driving reach chronic levels.

“We do everything we can to get high-risk people off the road,” said Robert Martinez, a Probation Officer who a member of the Task Force. Assisting with DUI checkpoints, his role is to identify probationers who, as a condition of their probation, are not supposed to be driving a vehicle, drinking alcohol, or be with anyone who is drinking.

“If you are on probation and you are caught in any one of those situations, you are going directly to jail,” he said.

According to local police, such crackdowns have been very successful in prevention alcohol-related incidents. But even after they are arrested, sent to jail, and finally go through their court-ordered counseling programs, many DUI offenders will be back out on the road again at some point in the future, driving under the influence of alcohol.

“The recidivism rate for those going through DUI Programs is 77%,” said Dobbs. That means eight out of ten will be back again. “This is where we all have a serious responsibility. It is a very stubborn problem, and we as a society must find more effective ways to reduce the number of people that keep cycling through the system,” she said.

As far as what can be done, Dobbs suggests that there must be greater accountability for those who contribute to the problem. “Those of us who have parties at our homes where alcohol is consumed in high amounts should share some of the responsibility; also bars and restaurants that serve alcohol to their customers beyond the point of intoxication,” she said.

According to Dobbs, if we are to reduce drinking and driving, we need to recognize that we have collective responsibility for solving the problem.