



*Applied Research for Community Health & Safety**

NEWS RELEASE

Date: December, 2009
For Immediate Release

Website:
www.archsinstitute.org

Contact:
Andrew Matlock
(909) 266-1660

Despite the dangers and costs, many continue to drink and drive during the holidays

Things to remember to ensure a safe holiday celebration:

Whether it is a glass of wine at a family Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner, a champagne toast at a New Year's Eve party or a couple of beers during college football bowl games on New Year's Day, alcohol has become increasingly associated with holiday celebrations.

Unfortunately, celebrations can often get out of hand with excessive amounts of alcohol being consumed. When motorists decide to drive under the influence (DUI), crashes become inevitable with property damage, injury and death becoming all too common during the holiday season.

Holiday Period	Fatalities per Day	Percent of Total Fatalities
Christmas	45	38 %
New Year's	54	41 %
Whole Year	36	31%

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports that on average, during the years from 2001 to 2005, about 40 percent of all fatalities during the Christmas and New Year holiday periods occurred in crashes where at least one of the drivers was alcohol-impaired.

In addition to the loss of life and recovery time from injuries resulting from DUI incidents, alcohol-related accidents come with a substantial economic burden. According to the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs, in 2006, the financial costs associated with alcohol-related crashes in the U.S. were estimated at \$51 billion annually.

Meanwhile, the Automobile Club of Southern California estimates that the costs related to a first-time misdemeanor DUI conviction are over \$13,000.

Despite the significant financial costs, people continue to drink and drive during the holiday season which is why anyone whose end-of-the-year celebrations include the consumption of alcohol should know there will be heightened law enforcement activities specifically targeting DUI drivers.

Estimated DUI Costs	
Fines (minimum)	\$468
Penalties (minimum)	\$780
Tow/impound fee	\$187
Alcohol education class	\$500
Auto insurance increase	\$8,652
Attorney and legal fees	\$2,557
DMV license reissue fee	\$100
Victim Restitution Fund	\$100
Booking, fingerprinting and photo fee	\$156
Total	\$13,500

Utilizing recently obtained grant money from the California Office of Traffic and Safety (OTS), San Bernardino County law enforcement agencies will be implementing the “Avoid the 25” program which will include six sobriety checkpoints and 34 saturation patrols from the High Desert to the East and West Valleys. Last year, a similar campaign netted 873 DUI arrests in San Bernardino County.

This program is intended to insure the safety of everyone by getting intoxicated drivers off the road and into a DUI program. In a December 17 press release regarding traffic safety during the holidays, OTS Director Christopher J. Murphy said, “DUI checkpoints are time-tested and proven as the most effective DUI countermeasure and I’m gratified that we’re seeing the life-saving results.”

In addition to law enforcement activities, there are several things that can be done to prevent intoxicated drivers from ever even getting behind the wheel of their car that are especially important for those who choose to host a party to remember. A responsible party host can ensure that everyone has a safe and fun celebration and is alive to tell about it by incorporating a few, simple precautions:

- Make sure those who choose to drink have a designated driver
- Provide food and a variety of non alcoholic beverages for those who choose not to drink
- Do not serve alcohol to someone who is intoxicated
- If a guest is intoxicated and does not have a ride home call a taxi or have them stay with you
- Never serve alcohol to anyone who is under 21
- Take steps to ensure minors do not have access to alcohol

The decision to not allow underage drinking to occur may seem obvious to most but there are still those who mistakenly think it is all right for young people to drink as long as it is monitored and done in what they believe is the safety of a home environment.

According to Virginia Gautier, executive director of the San Bernardino chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, this is an unfortunately common belief. “We have a lot of parents who are hosting parties and providing alcohol to teenagers.”

Gautier notes, “If you’re going to have a party, make sure it’s supervised; you can’t just leave kids alone and assume they’ll be okay.”

“You have to be very careful because if something happens as the result of you allowing underage drinking to occur, you can be held responsible,” adds Gautier.

Taking responsibility when hosting a party where youth are in attendance should not just be a seasonal occurrence which is why many local cities including Corona, Norco, Moreno Valley, Ontario and Pomona have adopted what are known as social host ordinances.

A social host ordinance holds the person who provides the location for an underage drinking party accountable since law enforcement officials say it is oftentimes difficult to determine who actually provides the alcohol at such parties.

Several coalitions throughout San Bernardino County are currently working to get social host ordinances adopted in their communities. For more information or to join one of these coalitions contact the Institute for Public Strategies at (909) 260-1660.