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National Road Safety Foundation Urges Motorists to Plan Ahead for Safe Holiday Driving

Impaired Driving Spikes During Holiday Period;
Alcohol, Drugs and Fatigue Are Major Factors in Fatal Holiday Crashes

NEW YORK, Dec. 9, 2024 -- The year-end holidays leading up to New Year's is one of the most dangerous times on American roads and highways, with a spike in crashes that result in serious injuries or death. The National Road Safety Foundation, a non-profit group that for more than 60 years has been promoting safe driving through education, says the increased risk comes from a combination of factors that include impairment from alcohol and drugs coupled with a higher incidence of drowsy driving.

"Planning ahead by having a designated driver when going to family gatherings and holiday parties is a good way to travel safely," said Michelle Anderson, director of operations at The National Road Safety Foundation. "Passengers can also play a role in keeping everyone safe by speaking up if a driver is impaired, drowsy or driving recklessly. Speaking up can prevent a tragedy from marring the holidays."

In 2022, 13,524 fatalities in motor vehicle traffic crashes involved alcohol-impaired drivers, representing 31% of all traffic fatalities in the U.S. for the year. In December 2022 alone, more than a thousand people died in alcohol-impaired-driving crashes, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). Christmas and New Year's Eve were especially dangerous, with more drunk-driving fatalities than during any other holiday.

The 21- to 24-year-old age group had the highest percentage (29%) of alcohol-impaired drivers involved in fatal crashes compared to other age groups in 2022. Male drivers are almost four times more likely than female drivers to drive drunk.

The financial impact of impaired driving crashes is enormous – more than \$58 billion every year in property damage, medical expenses and lost work time, according to NHTSA. If you're convicted of impaired driving, you can lose your license and even face jail time. A DUI can cost more than \$10,000 in fines, attorney fees and higher insurance rates for years.

Drugs, both legal or illegal, are another big factor in fatal crashes. Even in states where marijuana is now legal, it is against the law to drive while impaired. Some prescription drugs can also cause impairment or drowsiness, so it is important to check labels and be aware of possible side effects before driving.

Since fatigue is also a factor in many holiday crashes, the National Road Safety Foundation urges drivers to be alert to signs of drowsiness while driving:

- Difficulty focusing, frequent blinking, rubbing eyes
- Daydreaming or not remembering the last few miles driven
- Head snaps, nodding and yawning
- Drifting out of your lane, tailgating or hitting rumble strips

If you experience any of these warning signs, pull over safely and take a break. Have a cup of coffee or a caffeinated snack or take a 20-minute nap. Allow 30 minutes for caffeine to enter your bloodstream. Common "remedies" like blasting the radio or opening the car windows are not effective at preventing drowsiness while driving.

The National Road Safety Foundation has free resources on impaired and drowsy driving, including a drowsiness self-assessment quiz. There is also a guide with tips to help passengers speak up when in a vehicle being driven dangerously. They are at www.nrsf.org/resources

The National Road Safety Foundation, Inc., a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization, produces free videos and teaching materials on distracted driving, speed and aggression, impaired driving, drowsy driving, driver proficiency, pedestrian safety and a host of other safety issues. It also sponsors contests to engage teens in promoting safe driving to their peers and in their communities, partnering nationally with youth advocacy groups including SADD, FCCLA, Impact Teen Drivers and Teens in the Driver Seat and regionally with auto shows in Chicago and Detroit. NRSF also sponsors a national teen video contest, Drive2Life, which opens for entries next month. Info is at <https://www.nrsf.org/contests/drive2life>.

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