"Drive Hammered, Get Nailed" Program Returns to Grays Harbor County

Local News

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Grays Harbor County -**Between August 14 and September 7** extra DUI patrols will traverse Grays Harbor County roadways in search of impaired drivers.

Participating in this summer’s Drive Hammered, Get Nailed enforcement campaign are the Aberdeen, Cosmopolis, Elma, Hoquiam, McCleary, Montesano and Ocean Shores Police Departments, the Grays Harbor County Sheriff’s Office and the Washington State Patrol, with the support of the Grays Harbor Target Zero Traffic Safety Task Force.

There are numerous myths surrounding impaired driving, chief of which is that one must have consumed alcohol in order to be arrested for DUI. Drivers can become impaired by the use of illegal, prescription, and even over-the-counter drugs, or some combination of these, with or without the presence of alcohol.

OTHER MYTHS ABOUT IMPAIRED DRIVING:

FALSE: You can sober up quickly by drinking coffee, taking a cold shower or consuming an energy drink. TRUTH: Only time will sober you up. It typically takes about one hour for each drink that has been consumed.

FALSE: It’s OK to drive impaired if you are only going a short distance. TRUTH: It is never safe to drive under the influence.

FALSE: My doctor wouldn’t have prescribed the medicine if it wasn’t safe to drive while taking it. TRUTH: Prescription medications can impair you. If the bottle indicates that it is not safe to operate heavy machinery, you should not drive after taking that medication.

FALSE: I can’t be arrested for DUI if I am under a .08. TRUTH: You can be arrested for DUI if your ability to drive is affected by any substance, regardless of your blood alcohol content (BAC).

All of these and many more myths are untrue, yet recognizing and identifying the source of impairment can be complicated.

Today, there is a statewide network of specially trained law enforcement officers able to identify drivers who are under the influence of illegal, prescription, and/or over-the-counter drugs. They are called Drug Recognition Experts (DRE) and they are trained extensively about the differing effects of drugs and/or alcohol on the body.

DRE Deputy Eric Cowsert of the Grays Harbor County Sheriff’s Office shares the story of his first DRE evaluation, which involved a driver who had been smoking methamphetamine and heroin at a friend’s house. Upon leaving her friend, she called a family member for a ride, but then refused to get in the car. She got into her own truck and began driving home. A short distance later, the driver thought her friend had sabotaged her truck and that her steering wheel was on fire. She jumped out of her truck as is it was traveling at approximately 30 MPH. She was taken to a hospital where she admitted to smoking methamphetamine and heroin prior to driving, but did not believe she was DUI because she did not consume any alcohol. She was arrested for DUI.

In Washington State, the DRE program and toxicology testing are resulting in better identification of the effects of drugs on drivers. Between 1998 and 2007, drug-involved traffic deaths increased by 150 percent. During this time, the number of deceased drivers tested for drugs increased by 60 percent.

It is also important to emphasize that any law enforcement officer can arrest a driver suspected of DUI.

Impaired driving is the leading cause of traffic deaths in Washington. Last year, impaired drivers

contributed to the deaths of nearly half of the 522 people who died on Washington’s roadways. The 233 impaired driver-involved deaths in 2008 represent a decrease of 40 fatalities compared to the previous five-year average.

Nationally, there were almost 13,000 people killed by impaired drivers during 2007. Those preventable deaths represent an average of one person being killed every 40 minutes in the United States.

For additional information about the Washington Traffic Safety Commission, visit www.wtsc.wa.gov