

MEDIA RELEASE

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County Encourages Safe and Sober Driving over the Holidays

(OXNARD, Calif.) – As we enter into the holiday season, Ventura County Behavioral Health reminds adults to take a moment to think about their actions before they drive. Plan ahead, designate a sober driver, and enjoy the company of friends and family this season. The holidays are a time to spend with loved ones, make sure those you love do not end up in jail for driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

The most dangerous time of the year to be on the road is during the holiday season. After the food and festivities, for many over the age of 21, it is a time to drink alcohol, use drugs or both. The combination of alcohol with prescription medication can magnify the effect of drugs on a person's ability to drive. This year, make a conscious choice to never mix impairing drugs with alcohol and to plan ahead while at a holiday party.

Drug impaired driving carries the same penalties as drunk driving. You could face jail time, fines, loss of driver's license, towing fees, and other expenses, totaling nearly \$15,000. That doesn't even count the heftier price you could pay: the price of your life or someone else's.

"The average Southern Californian will drive 50 miles or more during the holiday season. Impaired driving is a choice. When you choose to drive under the influence of drugs or in combination with alcohol, everyone loses. There are plenty of police officers and deputies patrolling our streets who are specially trained Drug Recognition Experts (DRE's) who expect to make arrests for drug impaired driving during the holidays. If you injure anyone while driving under the influence you can expect to spend up to three years in jail," detailed Captain Don Aguilar of the Ventura County Sheriff's Office.

Recent statistics reveal that 30 percent of drivers in fatal crashes had one or more drugs in their systems. A study of drivers showed more tested positive for drugs that may impair driving (14 percent) than did for alcohol (7.3 percent). Of the drugs, marijuana was most prevalent, at 7.4 percent, slightly more than alcohol.

Everyone should be mindful that if you're taking medication – whether prescription or over-the-counter – drinking even small amounts of alcohol can greatly intensify the impairment affects. "Over-the-counter painkillers, anxiety medication, and opioids like Norco can have an enormous negative effects on driving." David Tovar, OTS Grant Coordinator with Ventura County Behavioral Health continued, "This is an individual choice, nevertheless we can all do our part by talking with our friends, family, and loved ones about safe driving habits."

For more information about the VCBH drug impaired driving campaigns contact David Tovar at (805) 981-9115 or David.Tovar@Ventura.org. Funding for the message is provided by the California Office of Traffic Safety, through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. For more information, go to www.venturacountylimits.org.

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