



*** For Immediate Release ***

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**Western State Law Enforcement Agencies form Traffic Safety Coalition
to Remind Public to Drive Safe and Sober during Labor Day Holiday**

Olympia, WA – With summer winding down and fall activities beginning soon, the Labor Day holiday is seen by many as the last chance to hit the road and enjoy warm weather fun. However, the Washington State Patrol, along with 5 other western state highway agencies, want to remind all drivers that the long Labor Day weekend is one of the most dangerous times on our roads.

The National Safety Council predicts there will be approximately 400 traffic fatalities across the US during the long Labor Day weekend. State law enforcement agencies in Washington, Idaho, Oregon, California, Nevada, and Arizona are partnering in the Western State Traffic Safety Coalition with a special effort this holiday weekend to remind the traveling public that impaired driving is one of the leading causes of traffic fatalities. Officers and troopers will be on the roads in full force looking for evidence of impaired driving across the entire western region with a simple message -**there is no safe place for impaired driving.**

The traveling public is reminded that driving at any time impaired by any substance - alcohol or drugs, whether legal or illegal - is against the law in all states.

Law enforcement officers have been trained to observe drivers' behavior and to identify impaired drivers. Even in states where marijuana laws have changed, it is still illegal to drive under the influence of the drug.

All the state law enforcement agencies involved:

- have ensured their officers/ troopers are properly trained to recognize and handle drug-impaired drivers and have received "Advanced Roadside Impaired Driving Enforcement" (ARIDE) training to observe, identify, and articulate the signs of impairment related to drugs, alcohol or a combination of both.
- have specially trained officers/ troopers who are Drug Recognition Experts (DREs) to identify people whose driving is impaired by drugs other than, or in addition to, alcohol. DREs follow the same 12 step procedure called a Drug Influence Evaluation (DIE), to determine which category of drugs is causing the driver to be impaired.

In a recent survey, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found that 20 percent of surveyed drivers tested positive for potentially impairing drugs. Using two or more drugs at the same time, including alcohol, can amplify the impairing effects of each drug a person has consumed. Alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs impair the ability to drive because they slow coordination, judgment, and reaction times. Cocaine and methamphetamine can make drivers more aggressive and reckless. Some prescription and over-the-counter medicines can cause extreme drowsiness, dizziness, and other side effects.

There are many misconceptions about marijuana use, including rumors that marijuana can't impair you or that marijuana use can actually make you a safer driver. Several scientific studies indicate that this is false. Research shows that marijuana impairs motor skills, lane tracking and cognitive functions. THC in marijuana also hurts a driver's ability to multitask, a critical skill needed to drive safely.

According to WSP Chief John R Batiste, "Impaired driving is a leading factor in traffic deaths in our state. This is especially poignant during the long Labor Day weekend when families are traveling together for the last taste of summer." Chief Batiste continued, "In the past 10 years, the Washington State Patrol has averaged almost 15,000 DUI arrests each year and responds annually to over 2,100 collisions where DUI is involved. On average, 250 people die on our state's highways each year because of impaired driving. Don't let yourself, a loved one, the stranger, or the family in the other car become part of these statistics this weekend." He concluded, "Please enjoy friends, family, and traveling in our beautiful state this holiday but drive safe and drive sober. There is no reason to make the worst decision of your life and drive drunk or high and there is nowhere in this part of the country to hide if you do."

