



Community Coalitions Department



Bringing the pieces together to protect our youth and communities from substance abuse

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

JULY 1st, 2009

Contact: Shelly Higgins, Media Coordinator, 713-478-0421

**July 4<sup>th</sup> and Drunk Drivers**

Summer is for barbecues, backyard parties, trips to the beach, skiing on the lake, and celebrating holidays like July 4<sup>th</sup> and Labor Day. Unfortunately, this time can be one of the deadliest and most dangerous times of the year due to an increase in impaired driving.

“Unfortunately, drunk driving has almost become a summertime tradition,” says Kristi Allen, Director of Coalitions Department of the Bay Area Council on Drugs and Alcohol. “People get together to eat, drink, and enjoy the weather, and forget to monitor their alcohol intake or appoint a designated driver.”

Drunk driving is one of Texas’ deadliest problems. About every 20 minutes in Texas, someone is hurt or killed in a crash involving alcohol. The Texas Department of Transportation announced that in 2006 there were 1,677 alcohol related fatal crashes in the state of Texas. Statistics show that almost half of all traffic accident fatalities on July 4<sup>th</sup> can be blamed on alcohol. The Fourth of July holiday is the second most deadly holiday period of the year – just behind New Year’s Eve.

“Driving under the influence is an easily preventable phenomenon,” says Allen. “When you go to a party and have to drive yourself home, take responsibility—limit how much you drink, or find someone to give you a ride. It’s really as simple as that.”

In Texas, a person is legally intoxicated and may be arrested and charged with DWI with a .08 BAC (blood or breath alcohol concentration). However, a person is also intoxicated if impaired due to other drugs regardless of BAC. Whether you are the driver or the passenger, you can be fined up to \$500 for having an open alcohol container in a vehicle. You can be charged with child endangerment for driving while intoxicated if you’re carrying passengers younger than 15 years old.

“Too many people still fail to understand that alcohol and driving don’t mix. Impaired driving is no accident—nor is it a victimless crime. It’s vitally important that we bring this tragic situation to an end,” said Allen.

State and national laws have strengthened in an effort to address the DWI epidemic, but it’s slow work. Driver’s license suspensions, increased enforcement through “No Refusal” Operations, and community-based approaches, have all proven effective in stemming the DWI problem—but not eradicating it.

<continued>



## Community Coalitions Department



Bringing the pieces together to protect our youth and communities from substance abuse

The most effective prevention of drunk driving is made by drivers themselves. Much of the tragedy from drunk driving can be prevented with a few simple precautions before going out to celebrate:

- Plan a safe way home before the festivities begin;
- Before drinking, designate a sober driver and give that person your keys;
- If you're impaired, use a taxi, call a sober friend or family member, or use public transportation so you are sure to get home safely;
- Use your community's Safe Ride Home program if they have one or other driver programs such as [www.DD4HIRE.com](http://www.DD4HIRE.com)
- If you happen to see a drunk driver on the road, don't hesitate to contact your local law enforcement;
- And remember, *Friends Don't Let Friends Drive Drunk*. If you know someone who is about to drive or ride while impaired, take their keys and help them make other arrangements to get to where they are going safely.
- And there is always the option not to drink alcohol.

Driving impaired is simply not worth the risk. The consequences are serious and real. Not only do you risk killing yourself or someone else, but the trauma and financial costs of a crash or an arrest for driving while impaired can be significant. Violators often face jail time, the loss of their driver's license, higher insurance rates, and dozens of other unanticipated expenses.

"It's obvious to recognize someone who's had way too much to drink to drive safely. But what about those who have had just a few too many?" said Allen. "You don't have to be 'falling down drunk' to be a threat to yourself and others on the road."

Impairment begins with the first drink. Two or three beers in an hour can make some people legally intoxicated. Your gender, body weight, the number of drinks you've consumed, the time spent drinking alcohol and the amount of food you've eaten affect your body's ability to handle alcohol. Women, younger people and smaller people generally become impaired with less alcohol.

Don't let this Fourth of July blow up in your face. Remember; designate a sober driver before the parties begin. Don't drink and drive.

For more information, please contact the Coalitions Department of the Bay Area Council on Drugs and Alcohol at 281-212-2910 or [coalitions@bacoda.com](mailto:coalitions@bacoda.com).

###