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December 8, 2008

Tie One On for Safety

Every year during the holidays, families and friends gather for meals and parties in celebration of this season. The period from Thanksgiving through New Year's Day typically includes an increase in road travel – unfortunately, the combination of travel and celebration also results in an increase in drunk driving. Every year, approximately 1000 people die during this period in crashes related to drunk driving, according to the National Highway and Traffic Safety Administration.

This needless loss of life has inspired Mothers against Drunk Driving (MADD) to institute the “Tie One On for Safety Campaign” during the holiday season each winter. The MADD organizers hope to promote public awareness of the dangers of driving and drinking by asking Americans to pledge to drive “safe, sober, and buckled up,” not only during the holidays, but throughout the coming year. As a sign of their pledge, motorists place a MADD ribbon or window decal on their vehicles.

The statistics related to crashes involving drunk driving are sobering indeed. NHTSA reports someone is killed by a drunk driver every 40 minutes in this country. In 2007, an estimated 13,000 deaths were caused by alcohol impaired drivers. In addition, those injured in these accidents suffered “quality of life losses” estimated at \$63.2 billion. Total costs of alcohol-related crashes in the United States are estimated at \$114.3 billion, with \$71.6 billion being paid by people other than the drunk driver.

Since we are now in the holiday party season, this is an opportune time to issue some reminders about avoiding alcohol related accidents:

First, watch out for signs of impairment in others. When driving, stay a safe distance away from other drivers who weave from one side of the road to the other, make excessively wide turns at intersections, follow other vehicles too closely, drive too fast or too slow, break unnecessarily or stop inappropriately, or are slow to respond to traffic signals

Second, we need to be just as vigilant with regard to pedestrians as we are with impaired drivers. If you know someone who has been drinking and is planning to walk, call a cab for that person or offer to drive or escort him/her home, even if it is only a short distance away. While driving, watch out for pedestrians who may be under the influence of alcohol-- be alert for sudden, unexpected movements. And if you plan to walk anywhere, limit the amount of alcohol you consume, carry a flashlight, and wear retro-reflective clothing at night and fluorescent colors during the day.

Third, do not drive impaired; use the designated driver system to choose a driver who agrees to remain alcohol free or call a cab. If you do drink, limit the number of alcoholic beverages and pace yourself. Be sure to eat meals or substantial snacks in between drinks, and consider alternating alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic substitutes. Even if you think you are not impaired, if another person believes you have had too much to drink, use a designated driver, call a cab, or spend the night. Be responsible.

So, instead of “tying one on,” consider “Tying One On for Safety.” Whether you are a party guest or the host, a number of measures can be taken to keep you and those around you safe this holiday season. MADD offers a number of tips on their website at www.madd.org (800-438-6233). Another good source of information about

drunk driving is NHTSA, at www.nhtsa.dot.gov (888-327-4236). And the Central Connecticut Health District can provide further information about this or other public health topics to residents online at www.ccthd.org, or by calling 721-2822. The staff of the Health District wish all our residents a healthy, safe, and happy holiday season.