HSS Safety Message

Summer Safety Message
Impaired Driving

Alcohol impaired driving is one of America's most-often-committed and deadliest crimes.
Every day, 36 people in the United States die, and approximately 700 more are injured, in motor vehicle crashes that involve an alcohol-impaired driver. Overall in 2007, nearly 13,000 people were killed in highway crashes involving a driver or motorcycle operator with an illegal blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .08 or higher. The annual cost of alcohol-related crashes totals more than $51 billion. But there are effective measures that can help prevent injuries and deaths from alcohol-impaired driving.

Far too many people still don't understand that alcohol, drugs and driving don't mix. Impaired driving is no accident—nor is it a victimless crime.

Impaired Driving National Enforcement Crackdown
August 21 through September 7, 2009

Drunk Driving. Over the Limit. Under Arrest.

The national *Drunk Driving. Over the Limit. Under Arrest.* impaired driving crackdown is a program organized by the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) that focuses on combining high-visibility enforcement with heightened public awareness through advertising and publicity.
For more information, visit www.StopImpairedDriving.org.

How big is the problem?

- In 2007, over 1.4 million drivers were arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol or narcotics. That's less than one percent of the 159 million self-reported episodes of alcohol-impaired driving among U.S. adults each year.
- Drugs other than alcohol (e.g., marijuana and cocaine) are involved in about 18% of motor vehicle driver deaths. These other drugs are generally used in combination with alcohol.
- Half of the 306 child passengers ages 14 and younger who died in alcohol-related crashes in 2006 were riding with drivers who had a BAC level of .08 or higher.
- In 2006, 45 children age 14 years and younger who were killed as pedestrians or bicyclists were hit by alcohol-impaired drivers.

Who is at risk?

- **Males:** Male drivers involved in fatal motor vehicle crashes are almost twice as likely as female drivers to be intoxicated with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.08% or greater. It is illegal to drive with a BAC of 0.08% or higher in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.
- **Young people:** At all levels of BAC, the risk of being involved in a crash is greater for young people than for older people. In 2006, 19% of drivers ages 16 to 20 who died in motor vehicle crashes had been drinking alcohol. In 2007, of the 6,159 passenger vehicle drivers in the age group of 21 to 34 killed in crashes, 51 percent had a BAC of .08 or higher.
  - Young men ages 18 to 20 (under the legal drinking age) reported driving while alcohol-impaired more than any other age group.
  - Of the 1,746 traffic fatalities among children ages 0 to 14 years in 2006, about one out of every six (17%) involved an alcohol-impaired driver.
- **Motorcyclists**: Nearly half of the alcohol-impaired motorcyclists killed each year are 40 or older, and motorcyclists ages 40-44 have the highest percentage of fatalities with BACs of 0.08% or greater.
- Drivers with prior driving while impaired (DWI) convictions: Among drivers involved in fatal crashes, those with BAC levels of 0.08% or higher were eight times more likely to have a prior conviction for DWI than were drivers who had not consumed alcohol.

Look Ahead and Prevent:

Fortunately, much of the tragedy that comes from impaired driving crashes could be prevented if everyone would take these few simple precautions:

- Plan ahead. If you are planning to drink alcohol with friends, designate a sober driver before going out and give that person the keys;
- If you didn't plan ahead and you're impaired, call a taxi, use mass transit or call a sober friend or family member to get you home safely;
- Use your community's Sober Rides program;
- Promptly report drunk drivers you see on the roadways to law enforcement;
- Wear your seat belt while in a car or use a helmet and protective gear when on a motorcycle as these are your best defenses against an impaired driver;
- And remember, 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.

Drunk driving is a serious crime.

- Driving with a BAC of .08 or higher is illegal in every state.
- Modest declines were seen in 2007, but the death rate is still too high.
- Traffic fatalities in alcohol-impaired driving crashes decreased nearly 4 percent from 13,491 in 2006 to 12,998 in 2007.
- The alcohol-impaired driving fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled (VMT) decreased to 0.43 in 2007 from 0.45 in 2006.
- In 2007, the 12,998 fatalities in alcohol-impaired driving crashes represent an average of one alcohol-impaired driving fatality every 40 minutes.

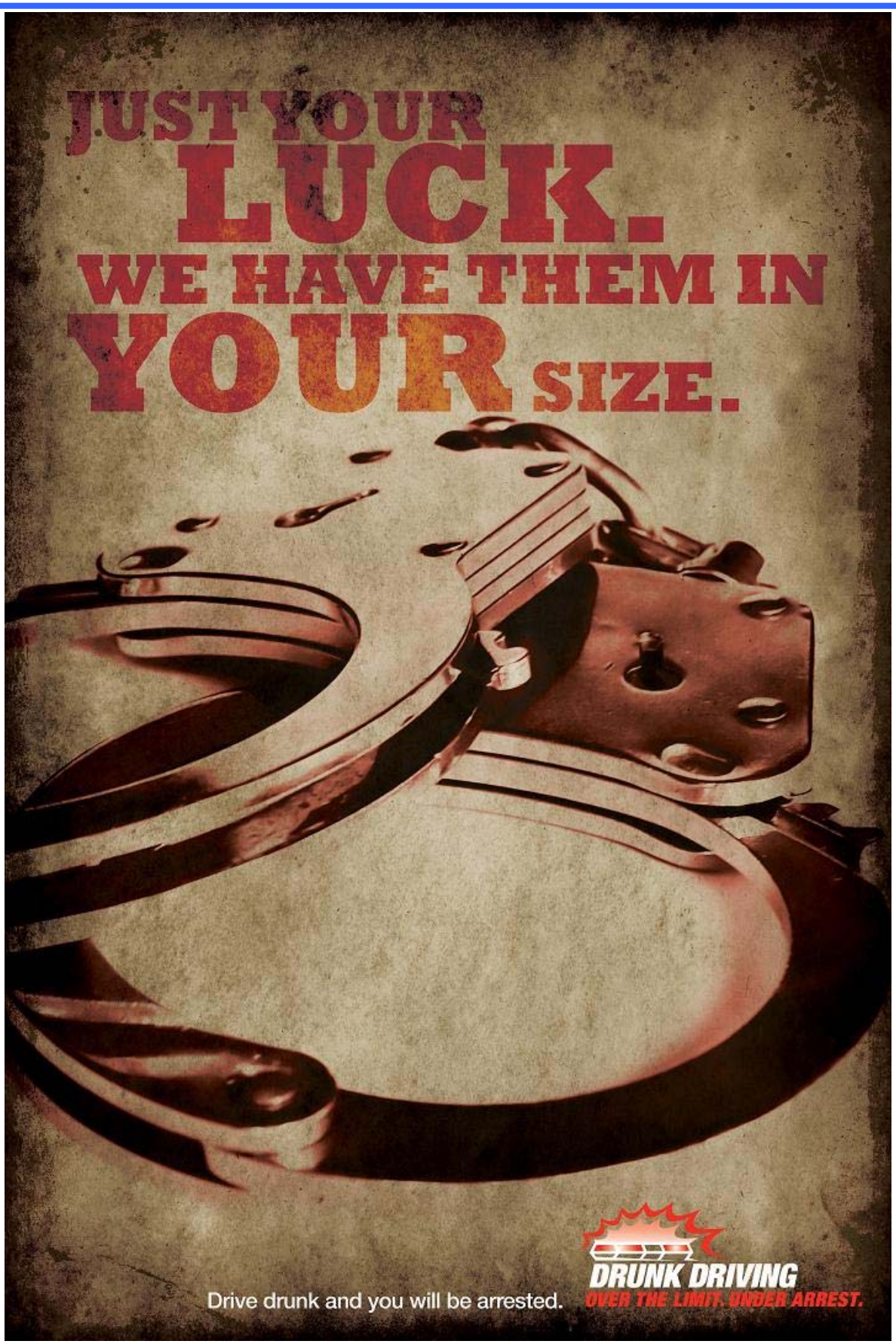
What is Drugged Driving?

"Have one [drink] for the road" was, until recently, a commonly used phrase in American culture. It has only been within the past 20 years that as a Nation, we have begun to recognize the dangers associated with drunk driving. Through a multipronged and concerted effort involving many stakeholders, including educators, media, legislators, law enforcement, and community organizations such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving, the Nation has seen a decline in the numbers of people killed or injured as a result of drunk driving. It is now time that we recognize and address the similar dangers that can occur with drugged driving.

In 15 states (Arizona, Georgia, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Virginia, and Wisconsin), it is illegal to operate a motor vehicle if there is any detectable level of a prohibited drug, or its metabolites, in the driver's blood. Other state laws define "drugged driving" as driving when a drug "renders the driver incapable of driving safely" or "causes the driver to be impaired."

Studies have found that drugs are used by 10 to 22 percent of drivers involved in crashes, often in combination with alcohol.

- In 2006, an estimated 13.3 percent of persons age 12 and older drove under the influence of an illicit drug or alcohol at least once in the past year. This percentage has dropped since 2005, when it was 14.1 percent. The 2006 estimate corresponds to 32.8 million persons.
- Driving under the influence of an illicit drug or alcohol was associated with age. In 2006, an estimated 7.3 percent of youth age 16 drove under the influence. This percentage steadily increased with age to reach a peak of 31.8 percent among young adults age 22. Beyond the age of 22, these rates showed a general decline with increasing age.
- Also in 2006, among persons age 12 and older, males were nearly twice as likely as females (17.6 percent versus 9.3 percent) to drive under the influence of an illicit drug or alcohol in the past year.

In recent years, drugs other than alcohol that act on the brain have increasingly been recognized as hazards to road traffic safety. Some of this research has been done in other countries or in specific regions within the United States, and the prevalence rates for different drugs vary accordingly. Overall, the research indicates that marijuana is the most prevalent illegal drug detected in impaired drivers, fatally injured drivers, and motor vehicle crash victims. Other drugs also implicated include benzodiazepines, cocaine, opiates, and amphetamines.

HSS Safety Message