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April 23, 2007

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OHS Coordinates Enforcement & Awareness Activities for Prom and Graduation Season

Dover – Delaware’s prom season is kicking into high gear and starting this weekend so are the efforts of highway safety and law enforcement officials working to keep students safe and alcohol-free now and into graduation season.

While it’s an exciting time for most teens, it can also be a dangerous one when alcohol enters the mix. National statistics from the U.S. Department of Transportation reveal that 48 teens are killed and more than 5-thousand injured in prom weekend wrecks, many of them involving alcohol.

The Delaware Office of Highway Safety is coordinating underage drinking prevention efforts that include enforcement, mailings to schools, funding after prom activities for pre-identified high schools, as well as a mix of advertising tactics to reach both teens and parents with important safety messages.

Enforcement activities begin this weekend and will run through the end of May. Delaware State Police, Dewey Beach, Dover, and Rehoboth Beach police as well as the Division of Alcohol Tobacco Enforcement (DATE) are participating. Officers may conduct saturation patrols, do a Cops In Shops (placing officers undercover in a liquor store) effort, or use Cooperating Underage Witnesses (CUW). Last year, 53 minors were arrested for alcohol violations including underage consumption, possession and/or DUI.

In conjunction with the enforcement, awareness efforts are being conducted on three additional fronts: paid media, alcohol-free after prom activities and school-based educational activities.

High School nurses have already received packages of materials which include posters, brochures, pins and key chains to help them promote an anti-impaired driving message. Additionally, OHS has provided grant funding to ten high schools for alcohol-free after prom activities. The schools include the Charter School of Wilmington, and Bridgeville, Tatnall, Dover, Dickenson, St. Mark's, Newark, AI DuPont, Concord and Brandywine High Schools. If successful, OHS will offer this option again in 2009.

Paid media efforts will include radio spots airing into June aimed at educating parents about the dangers and penalties of providing alcohol to minors, billboards placed near high schools encouraging them not to drink and ads on popular teen websites, My Space and Facebook. A click on the ad will take them to an information page which will give them the penalties for not only drinking and driving under Delaware's Zero Tolerance Law, but also of the penalties for underage possession and consumption of alcohol.

The following are a list of Delaware's penalties for various alcohol-related offenses involving minors:

- Underage Impaired Driving – loss of license for 2 months or \$200 fine if minor is driving without a license (1st offense). Penalties for minors with a Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) of .08 or higher may face more severe penalties.
- Underage Consumption or Possession – loss of license for 1 month or \$100 fine if unlicensed
- Using False Identification – up to \$500 fine or 30 days in jail if fine is not paid
- Entering a Bar or Package Store Underage - \$50 fine
- Providing a Minor with Alcohol – up to \$500 and 40 hours of community service

OHS is also participating on a Governor's statewide Alcohol Task Force and its efforts to curb underage access to alcohol, as well as underage drinking and driving. Projects in the works include proposed legislation which would strengthen penalties for underage consumption and possession of alcohol, in school awareness campaigns created by students and airing PSA's recorded by Delaware officials.

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