

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
March 16, 2016



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Keep the streets safe this St. Patrick's Day! Don't drink and drive.

[Oklahoma City, OK]—As one of the country's most popular holidays, St. Patrick's Day has long celebrated the roots of 34.2 million Americans with Irish ancestry, and many more who just want to partake in the festivities. But, did you know that in 2014 there were 18 people killed in impaired driving crashes on St. Paddy's Day? This year, make a better choice and designate a sober driver before you and you celebrate St. Patrick's Day.

Tragically, March 17 has become one of Oklahoma and our nation's deadliest holidays. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, during the 2014 St. Patrick's Day holiday period (6 p.m. March 16 to 5:59 a.m. March 18), more than a quarter (28%) of all motor vehicle crash fatalities involved impaired drivers. The early hours of March 18 didn't fare much better: between midnight and 5:59 a.m., nearly half of all crash fatalities involved impaired drivers. In fact, from 2010 to 2014, almost three-fourths of the impaired-driving fatalities during this holiday period involved drivers who had BACs well above the .08 limit. And keep an eye out for pedestrians who have had too much to drink: Walking while intoxicated can also be deadly, as lack of attention could put you at risk of getting hit by a vehicle.

A little good news? That number of fatalities over the holiday period has decreased from 2013. On St. Patrick's Day in 2013, 32 lives were lost to impaired driving, two in Oklahoma.

"We are greatly encouraged by the downward trend in fatalities," said Toby Taylor, Director of the Oklahoma Highway Safety Office. "However, we still want to encourage everyone to make a plan before heading out to the festivities. Understand the danger of driving impaired. You should never drive under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Designate a sober driver before you and your friends go out to celebrate St. Patrick's Day. Make a good choice to designate a sober driver before you celebrate. Remember: Even one drink is dangerous if you are behind the wheel of a car.

Let's make 2016 safer. Use this party-planning checklist to stay safe this St. Patrick's Day.

- **PARTY PREPARATION:** Designate a sober, reliable driver to get you home safely. Find the name of a taxi company (or two), and keep their numbers in your phone, or download the NHTSA SaferRide app, available for Android <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.nhtsa.SaferRide&hl=en> and Apple <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/saferride/id950774008?mt=8>.

- ON ST. PATRICK’S DAY: Before you take your first sip of green beer, leave your keys at home or give them to a friend. Ensure your designated driver has committed to a sober evening. If you’re the designated driver, do not drink. Your friends are relying on you, as are the people with whom you share the road. Enjoy non-alcoholic beverages and tweet your VIP (very important partygoer) status online using the hashtag #designateddriver #enduiok
- EVERY DAY: First, commit to driving sober today, St. Patrick’s Day, and every day. Second, always keep the number of a taxi company in your phone or in your wallet so you have a backup plan if you find yourself in need of a sober driver. Last, be sure to download NHTSA’s SaferRide app. Using your location, the app can find a taxi nearby, as well as help you contact a friend from your selected list of contacts. If you’re impaired, don’t let pride get in the way of calling a sober friend or family member to get you home safely. Help spread the word about the dangers of impaired driving, and the resources available to keep the streets safe.

Fact: In 2014, on average, 1 person was killed every 53 minutes in an impaired-driving crash in the United States. That totaled 9,967 impaired-driving fatalities that year. Too many people are not getting the message. Impaired driving is deadly and illegal. In fact, even if you have a BAC under .08, you could still be arrested and convicted of drunk driving.

To drink and drive is a crime —you put yourself at risk, as well as others. The consequences can be fatal. If you see an impaired driver on the road, contact local police when it is safe to do so. You could save a life. Together we can ENDUI.

About the Oklahoma Highway Safety Office - The vision of the Oklahoma Highway Safety Office (OHSO) is to create and maintain an environment where Oklahoma roadways are safe for everyone. The OHSO coordinates a statewide behavioral highway safety program by making federal highway funds from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) available to state and local entities. These funds are for programs that help them enforce traffic laws, educate the public in traffic safety and provide varied and effective means of reducing fatalities, injuries and economic losses from collisions.

For more information, visit www.enduiok.com or www.ohso.ok.gov

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