



CALLING DRIVERS' ATTENTION to a new statewide effort to get drunk drivers off North Carolina highways are (from left) Holden Beach Police Chief Robert Cook, Tim Phillips of the Governor's Highway Safety Program, Ocean Isle Beach Patrolman E.F. Lammonds, Shallotte Patrolman W.T. Smead and Shallotte Police Chief Rodney Gause.

CHECKPOINTS TO BE SET UP AT RANDOM

Local, State Law Enforcers Mount 'Booze It & Lose It' DWI Campaign

BY SUSAN USHER
South Brunswick Islands law enforcement agencies are working with their counterparts at the state and county level for "Booze It & Lose It," a statewide campaign to get drunk drivers off North Carolina highways.

Each of the four South Brunswick municipalities with a police force of its own (Shallotte, Ocean Isle Beach, Sunset Beach, Holden Beach) will work on its own and with other agencies, said Shallotte Police Chief Rodney Gause at a kick-off promotion last week.

"The State Highway Patrol and county personnel will be coming in to the towns to help," he said. "We'll be conducting roving patrols, setting up checkpoints and we're already running radar."

"We're going to be working in town and out on the bypass, weekdays and weekends, at all hours and on an irregular schedule."

One checkpoint was set up in Brunswick County during the first week of the program, Nov. 14-20, resulting in six DWI charges and 10-day administrative license revocations. Officers also issued citations for 108 other violations, including 66 speeding, eight seat belt, two driving with license revoked, eight driving with no operator's license, and 32 unspecified violations.

Local DWI detection efforts are getting a boost from new technology. Shallotte Police Department has received a passive-active alcohol sensor from Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and Nationwide Insurance Co. While sensor data cannot be admitted as evidence in court, it can be used to develop probable cause for an arrest.

If a driver is stopped for speeding, for example, officers can also check for the presence of alcohol. In passive mode, said Ted Phillips of the Governor's Highway Safety Program, the small, hand-held PBA

3000 sensor can detect the presence of alcohol in a vehicle that officers normally might not suspect, allowing the officer to move to the next step.

Switched to active mode the sensor works as a portable breathalyzer, helping determine which drivers should be formally taken in and tested for blood alcohol concentration.

In North Carolina, drunk drivers lose their license on the spot. A driver is considered guilty of driving while impaired if blood alcohol concentration meets or exceeds .08 when tested, or if a driver is under the influence of or affected by alcohol or other drugs.

"Booze It & Lose It" uses the same format as the successful "Click It or Ticket" seat belt program earlier this year—periodic, intensive law enforcement and extensive public education.

According to Col. R.A. Barefoot of the N.C. Highway Patrol, high visibility enforcement has shown to be the best method of convincing people not to drink and drive. "Research shows that appeals to do what's right don't work for people

who drink and drive," he said. "What deters them is the risk of getting caught and losing their license."

A driver convicted of DWI stands to pay a higher cost than simply loss of a North Carolina driver's license. N.C. Insurance Commissioner Jim Long said a DWI conviction can cost a driver as much as \$6,000 for a first offense, with insurance rates alone jumping at 400 percent.

A first conviction results in license revocation for one year and, at minimum, a fine of up to \$100 and not less than 24 hours imprisonment, 24 hours community service, or 30 days without a limited driving privilege, or combination. The maximum punishment can be a fine of up to \$2,000, and not less than 14 days or more than 24 months' imprisonment.

North Carolina already has the third highest DWI arrest rate in the nation per licensed driver. Last year its officers arrested 74,867 people for DWI.

According to the N.C. Department of Transportation Traffic Engineering Branch, drunk drivers also cost all North Carolinians—nearly \$1 billion in health care, insurance and

other related costs, the equivalent of \$214 a year for each licensed driver in the state.

Of the 1,129 highway accidents reported in Brunswick County during 1993, 112 were either alcohol or drug related.

Twelve people were killed, including two pedestrians, and 1,073 people injured, including 13 bicyclists, 18 pedestrians and 13 motorcyclists.

In addition to alcohol or drugs, other violations listed as causing those accidents included exceeding legal speed, 217; unsafe movement, 233; and yield, 140.

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