

Drinking and Driving; A Deadly Cocktail

Story by PA2 Jennifer Johnson, D7 Public Affairs

MIAMI -- That splendid time of year is rapidly approaching again. Daydreams of beaches, convertible cars, amusement parks and family gatherings will quickly replace the last few months of jackets, mittens and heaters. That's right, summer is almost here and while it can be packed with fun it can also turn tragic.

The Coast Guard wants to remind all of its members and their families to be extra careful during the busy summer season and remember that driving while intoxicated is never an option.

"Driving under the influence is completely unacceptable," said Master Chief Petty Officer Ted Fuller, the Coast Guard District Seven command master chief. "I have been in the Coast Guard a long time and have seen the huge impact it has on our members and their families. We all must realize that the losses affect people both personally and professionally. As well, it limits our mission readiness and effectiveness."

According to the fourth quarter 2006 Good Order and Discipline Report, 23 Coast Guard members received non-judicial punishment for drunken or reckless operation of a vehicle, aircraft, or vessel.

"Making the choice to drive after you have been drinking, even just a little, can have disastrous effects," said Chief Petty Officer, Patricia Holmes, Coast Guard District Seven, command drug and alcohol representative. "Not only will you suffer consequences at work and criminal charges, you are also putting innocent people's lives in danger when you get behind the wheel of a car intoxicated."

Throughout fiscal year 2006, Coast Guard members were involved in 463 off-duty, motor-vehicle accidents. Nine of those accidents resulted in fatalities and 13 accidents were alcohol related.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration alcohol-related traffic fatalities remain the number one killer of people ages 18 to 30 in the United States. Nationwide, one person every 40 minutes, approximately 35 people a day, or nearly 13,000 people each year, die in traffic crashes involving a driver or a motorcycle operator with a blood alcohol content of .08 or higher.

"You never know how your body is going to react to alcohol," said Holmes. "On average, it takes your body one hour to process one alcoholic drink but that standard differs for every person."

The NHTSA also believes just one drink can slow a person's reaction time and could make the difference between living and dying. Impairment is not determined by the type of drink, but rather by the amount of alcohol ingested over a period of time.

Holmes believes the best course of action to avoid being caught driving under the influence, is to be prepared to get home by some other means before you go out.

“If you plan to drink, always be prepared to get home by some other means before you go out,” Holmes said. “You can do that by designating a sober driver, saving enough money for a cab ride, using public transportation or crashing at your friend’s house.”

The American Automobile Association and Budweiser have teamed up again this year to offer the “Tow to Go” program. The program offers AAA members and non-members, a confidential free ride and tow of their vehicle in order to avoid a potential drunk-driving situation. This program, in existence since 1998, is available during eight high-risk holidays, including St. Patrick’s Day, Independence Day Weekend and Christmas.

Holmes also believes each of us has a responsibility to our friends and we should never be afraid to take someone’s car keys if necessary.

“It is easy to get caught up in the fun of summer, but for some of our members we need to make sure to look for signs of trouble before things get out of hand,” said Holmes. Possible signs of alcohol abuse to look for can be drinking alone, blacking out; not performing up to standards after a night out, a person needs a drink just to feel normal or someone who may feel they have a high tolerance for alcohol.

“If you find that you have a friend that may need help with alcohol abuse, please encourage them to seek assistance before the problem continues,” Holmes said. “A self-referral for an alcohol screening can be done in confidence and usually has no disciplinary action.”

If you, your family members or friends find themselves in a less than ideal alcohol situation, please think smart and don’t get behind the wheel of a car to drive. The choice you make could be your last.

-How to Die in Seven-Tenths of a Second-

Go to <http://www.safetycenter.navy.mil/presentations/ashore/motorvehicle/SevenTenths.htm> for a power point presentation on the consequence of drinking and driving.

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