

**March 2009**

## **Sobriety Checkpoints**

### **What the Nation's Leaders Have to Say**

"We know that sobriety checkpoints and other law enforcement efforts have been proven to reduce impaired driving and the needless deaths and injuries that go hand in hand with it," said **International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) President Russell B. Laine, Chief of the Algonquin, IL, Police Department**. "Law enforcement officers will be out in full force to crack down on impaired drivers, getting them off our nation's roads and behind bars."

"Among the benefits of sobriety checkpoints is the deterrent effect on impaired drivers. Checkpoints are an effort to make motorists more aware of the impaired driver problem and ultimately contribute to a reduction in the number of alcohol and/or drug-related crashes," said **Colonel Richard Collins, Superintendent of the Ohio State Highway Patrol**. "Based on provisional numbers in Ohio, there were 362 OVI-related fatal crashes in which 395 people were killed in 2008."

"The research is clear. Sobriety checkpoints serve as a powerful deterrent to drunk driving. Frequent and publicized checkpoints reduce impaired driving fatal crashes by 10 to 20%," **James C. Fell, Director, Traffic Safety and Enforcement Programs Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE) Calverton Office**.

### **Q&A**

#### What are sobriety checkpoints?

Sobriety checkpoints are a law enforcement technique where law enforcement officials evaluate drivers for signs of alcohol or drug impairment. Vehicles are stopped in a specific sequence (e.g., every other vehicle or every fourth vehicle).

#### Is that legal/constitutional?

The Supreme Court ruled in *Michigan v. Sitz* that sobriety checkpoints are constitutional because the small inconvenience that drivers face is overwhelmed by a compelling state interest in saving lives.

#### How effective are sobriety checkpoints?

Right now, only one arrest is made for every 88 episodes of driving over the illegal limit. Thus, having concentrated enforcement can help apprehend drunk drivers and deter those who hear about the checkpoints from driving under the influence. The Centers for Disease Control studied sobriety checkpoints and found numerous studies that show they can reduce alcohol-related crashes and fatalities by 18-24 percent.

#### Won't this cost law enforcement a lot of money?

Actually, there are significant cost savings from high-visibility enforcement. One study found that there was an average cost savings of \$50,000 per checkpoint, including over \$3,000 in medical costs. Others have found that checkpoints save between six and 23 dollars for every dollar invested.

#### Don't saturation patrols, or roving patrols, get more arrests than sobriety checkpoints?

Sobriety checkpoints have a higher visibility and raise the perceived risk of getting caught more than do roving patrols or saturation patrols. This means they deter more people from committing the crime of drunk driving and thus save more lives. Sobriety checkpoints have a strong deterrent effect, which means that they may yield **fewer** arrests because they are doing what they are supposed to do – **prevent** people from committing the crime in the first place. Sobriety checkpoints are similar to a security checkpoint at the airport--they are done for the safety of everyone and they don't take much time.

#### Won't checkpoints cause a backlash against law enforcement?

Actually, studies have shown at least 75% approval for sobriety checkpoints. Interesting, studies have found 90 percent approval ratings for sobriety checkpoints after checkpoints have begun, meaning that support won't trail off – it will grow.

#### What is the difference between saturation patrols, sobriety checkpoints and roving patrols?

- ▶ Sobriety checkpoint: law enforcement evaluates drivers for signs of alcohol or drug impairment at certain points on the roadway. Vehicles are stopped in a specific sequence, such as every other vehicle or every fourth, fifth or sixth vehicle. Sobriety checkpoints must display warning signs to motorists. Police must have a reason to believe the driver stopped at a checkpoint has been drinking before a breath test can be conducted.
  
- ▶ Saturation patrol: concentrated enforcement effort that targets impaired drivers by observing moving violations such as reckless driving, speeding, aggressive driving, and others. A saturation patrol is generally spread over a larger geographic area than a sobriety checkpoint.
  
- ▶ Roving patrol: an enforcement effort that targets impaired drivers by observing moving violations such as reckless driving, speeding, aggressive driving, and others. Not necessarily enhanced.

#### Aren't roving patrols/saturation patrols more targeted and successful at catching the higher-risk drivers with high BAC's? Checkpoints are stationary and drunks find their way around them.

The point of a checkpoint is to deter primarily and to enforce the law when required. Sobriety checkpoints are higher visibility and raise the perceived risk of getting caught more than do roving patrols or saturation patrols. This means they deter more people from committing the crime of drunk driving and thus save more lives.

#### Don't checkpoints target social drinkers?

No. Checkpoints target the general population...anyone driving. If someone is driving impaired, law enforcement will test them and enforce the law. If someone is not driving impaired and has not broken any laws, their stop will be minimal and they will be on their way. Checkpoints reduce alcohol-related traffic crashes when they are frequent, and highly publicized. They deter people from driving impaired.