



# The Red Light Alert

## ST. Patrick's Day Revelers Warned: It's not a Lucky Day for Drunk Drivers

The luck of the Irish runs out when motorists drive drunk this St. Patrick's Day. Nearly 100 Michigan law enforcement agencies will be taking part in a special drunk driving crackdown that will put additional officers on the road. St. Patrick's Day poses a special threat because of daylong celebrations and free-flowing green beer.

And, it's the first time that the traditional drinking holiday will be celebrated under lower blood alcohol limits and tougher penalties for drunk and impaired offenders.

### .08 and St Patrick's Day

A five-year average of alcohol-related fatalities in Michigan shows a dramatic increase in the number of people killed in traffic crashes on St. Patrick's Day. On a typical day, an average of 1.37 people die in alcohol related crashes in Michigan. On St. Patrick's Day,

the average surges to 2.36, an increase of more than 50 percent.

With St. Patrick's Day approaching and party plans developing, Michigan drivers should keep in mind the new .08 law and the statewide special enforcement.

### Increased Enforcement

"Federal funds will be used to increase overtime patrols and police presence with one purpose - finding and arresting drunk drivers," said Michael L. Prince, Office of Highway Safety Planning (OHSP) division director. "Special training and experience means there's no 'outsmarting' an officer if a person is driving drunk."

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**Michael L. Prince**

St. Patrick's Day party plans should include designating a sober driver or securing other transportation like a cab or bus.

Eleven counties are receiving federal traffic safety funding for overtime patrols for the holiday period mobilization from March 12 through March



Drinking and Driving at any time don't mix!

27, 2004, including: Bay, Ingham, Genesee, Jackson, Livingston, Macomb, Oakland, Ottawa, Saginaw, St. Clair and Wayne counties. For a complete listing of departments participating in the mobilization, visit OHSP's website at [www.michigan.gov/ohsp](http://www.michigan.gov/ohsp).

### Visible Enforcement

Studies show that motorists are more likely to drive sober when patrols are combined with highly visible public awareness efforts, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). OHSP is coordinating the mobilization, providing federal traffic safety funds to

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## DID YOU KNOW?

Nationally, 1,561 people were killed in alcohol-related crashes between Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve in 2002.

Alcohol and a lack of seat belt usage claimed 2,464 lives between Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve in 2002.

In 2002, 17,419 people were killed in crashes involving alcohol—an average of one every 30 minutes. An estimated half a million people are injured in alcohol related crashes each year.

Alcohol-related crashes cost the public an estimated \$114.3 billion annually—this includes an estimated \$63.2 billion lost in quality of life due to these crashes.

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boost patrols in selected areas to ensure widespread awareness of the program. In the current fiscal year, OHSP will provide nearly \$2 million in federal money to law enforcement agencies for overtime patrols.

Michigan was the 44th state to adopt a .08 blood alcohol content (BAC) standard for drunk driving offenses. Prior to the change in law, .08 BAC was considered impaired driving in Michigan, a lesser offense.

NHTSA estimates the country would save 400-600 lives each year if all states adopted .08 laws.

### Significant Impairment at .08

According to NHTSA, laboratory and on-road research shows that

the vast majority of drivers are significantly impaired at .08 with regard to critical driving tasks such as braking, steering, lane changing, judgment and divided attention. Additionally, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, driving skills can be affected at BAC levels as low as .02. Alcohol also affects everyone differently (by age, gender, physical condition, amount of food consumed, etc.), different drinks may contain different amounts of alcohol, and impairment can actually begin with the first drink.

### OWI Penalties

With the new drunk driving law, those convicted for a first drunk driving offense now face:

- Up to 93 days in jail

- Up to a \$500 fine
- Up to 360 hours of community service
- Up to 6 points on a driver's license
- Up to 180 days' license suspension.

In addition, convicted drunk drivers will be subject to a new \$1,000 fee for two consecutive years, for a total of \$2,000 in additional costs. Anyone who refuses a breath test the first time is given an automatic one year driver's license suspension.

**Editor's Note:** Office of Highway Safety Planning Press Release, dated 3-11-04. For more information contact Anne Readett - OHSP 517-333-5317.