

Oklahoma Department of Mental Health  
and Substance Abuse Services

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For Immediate Release

**State Agencies Working to Keep July 4<sup>th</sup> Weekend Safe for All**

The Oklahoma Highway Safety Office (OHSO) and Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (ODMHSAS) are partnering to keep the July 4<sup>th</sup> holiday weekend safe for all Oklahomans. OHSO is funding overtime enforcement efforts statewide as part of its ongoing ENDUI Statewide Impaired Driving Enforcement initiative. Additionally, the agency is helping to support ODMHSAS sponsored community underage drinking compliance checks, enforcement of social host laws and other related prevention efforts as a part of the 2M2L (2Much2Lose) Task Force.

For many Americans, celebrating the Fourth of July includes fireworks, parades, sparklers and backyard picnics. However, many of these celebrations and gatherings will be marred by tragic consequences tied to alcohol abuse. Nationally, July is a time when emergency room visits increase. Those numbers double over the July 4th holiday weekend. Alcohol-involved traffic crashes, poisonings and problems associated with underage drinking are a big part of why this occurs.

The Fourth of July holiday is a particularly dangerous time on Oklahoma's roads, primarily due to a sharp increase in impaired driving. There have been 23 Oklahomans killed in traffic crashes over the past two July 4<sup>th</sup> weekends. One in three of those deaths were due to impaired driving. In fact, July 3<sup>rd</sup> and July 6<sup>th</sup> have proven to be two of the deadliest days each year on Oklahoma roads.

Toby Taylor, OHSO director, says that any impaired driving fatalities are preventable fatalities.

“The July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend has consistently proven to be one of the deadliest holidays for Oklahoma drivers over the past 5 years. July 4<sup>th</sup> celebrations pose an increased risk when people make the decision to get behind the wheel while impaired.”

ODMHSAS Commissioner Terri White agrees with Taylor. She says alcohol abuse is a problem in Oklahoma, and that the joint holiday effort will save lives.

“Oklahoma experiences many negative consequences associated with alcohol abuse including preventable deaths, injuries and cost to the community,” said White. “In fact, approximately 1,350 Oklahomans die each year as a result of alcohol use.

“We can prevent death and senseless injuries that too often are associated with alcohol abuse, particularly the increase in problems that we see over holiday weekends. This is a public health issue, but it is also a public safety issue and it requires all of us working together to make a difference.”

Enforcement and prevention efforts will be ongoing throughout the holiday weekend in communities across the state.

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