

TerranearPMC Safety Share

Week of December 15, 2014 – Driving during the Holidays

'Tis the season and millions of people will take to the roads over the next few weeks to celebrate Christmas and New Year's. Without a doubt, this is a wonderful time and should not be marred through the devastation of a tragedy. Throughout the country, many states will enforce a zero tolerance policy for drinking and driving. And that means there will be increased patrols with law enforcement in action around the nation. This is a serious and strict campaign supported by all city police and county sheriff departments; and that means if you're over the blood-alcohol limit, you'll be under arrest. No warnings. No excuses.

All 50 states have adopted the legal blood alcohol limit of .08 (that's 0.08 grams of alcohol per 100 milliliters of blood), so even if holiday travels take you over a state line, you should know that there is no variation in the legal limit and that means a check point in any state that measures 0.08 or greater will place you behind bars.

In the state of Georgia last year during the holiday period (Nov. 20 – Dec. 31), there were nearly 44,000 crashes that resulted in 13,142 injuries and 160 fatalities. During the month of December in 2012, 830 people nationwide were killed in crashes involving at least one intoxicated driver. On average, 31 percent of all crash fatalities in America are alcohol-related, but on Christmas Day in 2012, that number increased to 36 percent.

In addition to drinking and driving, there are other things we must be aware of to ensure our holidays remain cheerful. Of course, obeying the typical rules of the road is very important. Such practices include 1) do not speed, 2) do not text, 3) look both ways before proceeding through an intersection and, 4) drive defensively. If you notice a fellow driver not yielding the right-of-way, maintain your patience and don't let someone's discourteous behavior get the better of you by prompting you to "get even." Road Rage is a dangerous game! Below are a few additional tips to hopefully make driving during the Holidays more enjoyable and safe and to help reduce stress levels.

- The first step is to make sure your vehicle is operating properly. The lights, oil, tires (condition and pressure level), belts and hoses, brake fluid, antifreeze fluid and the condition of the battery should all be checked before leaving.
- Plan your route in advance and check traffic reports and weather conditions before you leave. As a backup, bring along a paper map. Even with a GPS system it's wise to bring along another option should something occur where using a GPS is not possible.
- Follow speed limits and remember excess traffic and congestion on the roads may mean you'll have to travel below posted limits. Drive defensively and don't respond to aggressive drivers: It's far less frustrating to let an aggressive driver pass than to become aggressive yourself.



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- It sounds simple, but a good night's sleep before departing can help make the trip more enjoyable. Be sure to take regular breaks during long road trips as it can be very dangerous to drive when you're overly tired. Pull over and stop in a safe area if you are tired, or around every 100 miles or 2 hours.
- Be prepared for emergencies - keep a blanket, boots, an extra pair of gloves and a flashlight in the trunk of your car. Traction mats, kitty litter or sand can be used to improve traction on icy surfaces. Also, keep the gas tank at least half-filled to prevent fuel line freezing in colder climates (also make sure your cell phone is fully charged).
- Don't forget to secure your home when you leave, and do not post on social media sites like Face Book and Twitter, that you will be away. Timers to turn lights on and off can give the impression that the property is occupied. If possible, have a neighbor or relative check on the house and even park a car in the driveway. Let someone know where you are going and what time you expect to be there.
- Finally, relax. Driving during the holiday season can be stressful. Frustration can lead to poor decisions and risky behavior behind the wheel. However, with the right attitude and some pre-planning it can also be more enjoyable.

Multi-tasking while driving is never appropriate; yet we are all guilty of this. Moving along the freeway at high speeds while changing the radio station or adjusting the temperature is risky behavior, especially when traveling at high speeds or in a residential neighborhood. These are scenarios where a distraction for only one second can result in a serious accident. Today, the latest head gear for music also presents a potential red flag condition. True, technology has made some great advances in the entertainment field, but remember, when you are traveling on the road, driving should be the only priority. Listening to music with noise-canceling head phones makes it too easy to get distracted and lose your concentration of fellow drivers, road conditions as well as your own driving (it is not uncommon to find yourself listening to music that excites you, resulting in accelerating to extremely high speeds....way beyond the speed limit as well as any perceptible safe speed).

While it can be stressful imagining the miles that lay between you and your destination, a couple of deep breaths once in a while along with a positive attitude can go a long way. Remember to relax and focus on what's truly important: reaching your destination safely and having a wonderful time with family and friends.

There is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good humor

Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*

