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PRESS RELEASE

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California DUI Deaths Drop to Record Low

Largest Decline of Any State in Nation

SACRAMENTO – The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) announced today that California’s DUI deaths reached their lowest level ever in 2010. This also signifies the largest single yearly drop of DUI deaths in the past 14 years. A record low of 791 persons were tragically killed in DUI crashes on California roadways last year, compared to 950 in 2009. DUI deaths in California increased yearly from 1998 to 2005, but have decreased every year since 2005.

“This marks a huge milestone in the fight against drunk driving,” said California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) Director Christopher J. Murphy. “While we are elated by these figures, there were still 791 lives, futures, and dreams that will never be fully realized. We cannot back off from our ultimate goal – toward zero deaths.”

The Office of Traffic Safety credits the record number of DUI checkpoints conducted in 2010 as partly responsible for the sharp reduction in DUI deaths. OTS allocated \$16.8 million in federal funds to law enforcement agencies to conduct 2,553 DUI checkpoints in 2010, up from the \$11.7 million allocated to 1,740 checkpoints in 2009. According to NHTSA, checkpoints have provided the most effective documented results of any of the DUI enforcement strategies, while yielding considerable cost savings of \$6 for every \$1 spent. In addition, 88 percent of Californians surveyed report they support the use of checkpoints.

Other contributing factors include countywide Avoid DUI Task Force operations that saw the California Highway Patrol (CHP) team up with police departments across the state to arrest impaired drivers, the widespread recognition of the “Report Drunk Drivers Call 911” message promoted by CALTRANS through their changeable message signs, the many action items addressing DUI developed and implemented by state departments such as the Department of Motor Vehicles and local agencies through the Strategic Highway Safety Plan, the successful programs aimed at keeping alcohol from minors implemented by the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC), and the great work done by advocate and educational organizations such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), Safe Transportation Research and Education Center at U.C. Berkeley, and RADD – the entertainment industry’s voice for road safety.

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“Preventing these tragedies remains our top priority,” said CHP Commissioner Joe Farrow. “By combining DUI enforcement efforts of the entire law enforcement community, with the support and dedication of our traffic safety partners and the motoring public, we will continue to make strides toward reducing DUI fatalities.”

The announcement comes just days before the December 16 start of California’s December DUI Crackdown and NHTSA’s nationwide “Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over” campaign. The increased enforcement campaign ends January 2. Statewide 2010 DUI arrest numbers have been consistent with the past five years and higher than any year between 1997-2005.

“California has taken a comprehensive approach to reducing drunk driving including aggressive use of sobriety checkpoints” said NHTSA Administrator David Strickland. “We commend California for its commitment to highway safety and efforts by its law enforcement officers to keep drunk drivers off the roads.”

“The people of California are to be congratulated along with all those who actively worked to avoid these tragedies,” said Murphy. “They see that not only is drunk and drugged driving a serious crime affecting the lives of so many, it is now seen as a socially unacceptable behavior for everyone.”

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