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PRESS RELEASE

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Make It Home Safe for Thanksgiving

State Sets New Record for Seat Belt Usage, But Caution Needed

Sacramento, CA – While urging drivers to be extra cautious this Thanksgiving season, the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) announced that seat belt usage has hit an all time high. In California during the Thanksgiving holiday period in 2010, 38 individuals died on the state's roadways. Sober driving and seat belts would have saved many of those lives and kept hundreds more from being injured.

When seat belt usage hit an all time high in 2010 of 96.2 percent, speculation was whether it was possible to go any higher in a state as large and with as much geographic and demographic diversity as California. That speculation was answered with the release of 2011 figures showing a new record high usage rate of 96.6 percent.

“Seat belts save more lives in crashes than anything else,” said OTS Director Christopher J. Murphy. “It only takes two seconds to buckle up. If we could get everyone to drive sober and use seat belts every time they get in the car, over a thousand more Californians would be home for Thanksgiving.”

CHP and local police agencies will be enforcing the seat belt and child safety seat laws vigorously during the holiday season as part of the *Click It or Ticket* campaign. Even with the record high seat belt usage rate, over a million California drivers and passengers do not regularly buckle up, leaving them at a 50 percent greater risk of death or serious injury in a crash. Ticket costs for adults can start at \$142 and go up, while the cost of a ticket for an unrestrained child under 16 starts at \$474, along with a point against your driving record.

“Regardless of the time of day or distance of travel, everyone in the vehicle needs to take a moment and buckle up,” said CHP Commissioner Joe Farrow. “Seat belts are one way to keep from becoming a grim statistic; they save lives every day.”

(more)

Night-time is one of the more dangerous times on the road because seat belt use is traditionally lower. Of the vehicle occupant deaths at night during the 2010 Thanksgiving holiday period, at least 60 percent did not have their seat belts fastened, while one half of the deaths in day-time crashes were not buckled up.

California's vehicle fatality totals have been dropping steadily since the latest high in 2005. Under a shared vision of *Toward zero deaths – every 1 counts*, state and local agencies and organizations have been developing and implementing the California Strategic Highway Safety Plan since 2006. OTS, CHP, California Department of Transportation, Department of Motor Vehicles, Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, Department of Public Health, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Federal Highway Administration, county and local governments, as well as individuals and community organizations like Mothers Against Drunk Driving have been actively pursuing work on over 150 specific actions contained within the Plan.

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