

DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE: DESPITE INCREASED AWARENESS, STILL A COSTLY CRIME

For almost half a century, advocates, including Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), have brought increasing attention to the issue of impaired driving – one of the most preventable, and arguably, one of the most costly crimes to our society, both financially, as well as emotionally. However, despite these efforts, 9,878 individuals were still killed in impaired-driving related crashes across the U.S. in 2011, about one every 53 minutes, and around 350,000 were injured, about one every 90 seconds (www.madd.org).

In San Diego County, nearly half (45%) of motor vehicle drivers killed in an automobile crash in 2011 had a blood alcohol level in excess of .08 percent (www.sdcounty.ca.gov/me) and almost 1 in every 5 (18%) adult arrests was for driving under the influence (DUI), with over 43 arrests made on average every day (www.sandag.org/cj). In addition, a recent roadside survey in California of nighttime weekend drivers revealed that 14 percent of drivers tested positive for at least one illicit drug and 7 percent were positive for alcohol (www.cesar.umd.edu). While California had the 15th lowest rate of impaired driving-related deaths (of the 50 states and District of Columbia), there were still 774 impaired driving-related fatalities across the state in 2011, which represented more than one-quarter (28%) of all vehicle-related deaths. According to the same report (www.nhtsa.gov/FARS), around \$4.9 billion were spent by the state subsidizing impaired driving-related fatalities and the 2011 California Strategic Highway Safety Plan identified reducing impaired fatalities as the number one issue to be addressed by the State (www.dot.ca.gov/SHSP).

Analyses of 2011 data compiled through SANDAG's Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program, in which arrestees are interviewed within 48 hours of their arrest and booking into a local detention facility, revealed that 105, or 14 percent, of the 776 individuals arrested had a DUI-related charge as one of their three highest charges. Further analyses of the characteristics of these 105 individuals revealed that they may have been under the influence of alcohol and/or illicit drugs, and while they were more likely to be male and Hispanic, they represented a variety of age groups:

- 24 percent tested positive for marijuana, 12 percent for meth, 7 percent for opiates, and 4 percent for cocaine;
- 82 percent were male, compared to 63 percent of adults arrested and booked for a non-DUI offense;
- 27 percent were under the age of 25, 43 percent were between 25 and 39, and 30 percent were 40 years of age and older (similar to those arrested for non-DUI offenses: 30%, 37%, and 33%, respectively);
- 58 percent were Hispanic, 32 percent White, 7 percent Black, and 3 percent other ethnicities; of those arrested for a non-DUI offense, 34 percent were Hispanic, 44 percent White, 17 percent Black, and 4 percent other ethnicities.

Also, of arrestees who did *not* have a current DUI-related offense as one of their three highest charges, 18 percent said they had driven drunk in the past 12 months, 29 percent had driven under the influence of other drugs, and 33 percent and 39 percent, respectively, had ridden in a vehicle driven by someone under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

While our community has worked together to encourage the public to report impaired drivers, utilize sobriety checkpoints and targeted enforcement, worked with retail establishments to utilize responsible alcohol business practices, and implemented proven practices in the treatment and supervision of prior offenders, it is clear there is still more that can be done to ensure everyone's safety on our roadways. Local stakeholders are encouraged to support multi-faceted efforts to identify repeat offenders, utilize innovative strategies to ensure their compliance with conditions of supervision, require all offenders attend licensed treatment programs designed for impaired drivers as part of each court order, and ensure that feasible alternative modes of transportation are available and encouraged for those whose driving would be impaired if they operated a motor vehicle.