



Coalition to
End Needless Death
on Our Roadways

NEWS

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**Physician Group Issues Impaired Driving Health Warning & Call To
Action**

Data Reveals St. Patrick's Day Holiday One of Nation's Deadliest

For Immediate Release

Chicago, IL (3/10/05) – A new physician-lead traffic safety advocacy group called End Needless Death on Our Roadways (END), has issued a warning about the dangers motorists may face this coming weekend. Additionally, a call to action has been presented to the nation's law enforcement, hospitals and motorists to do their part to end needless death this weekend when a majority of Americans will be celebrating St. Patrick's Day.

“According to data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, St. Patrick's Day has become one of our nations most deadly impaired driving holidays,” said Dr. Andrea Barthwell, Co-Chairperson of END and former Deputy Director for Demand Reduction for the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy. “In 2003, 52 percent of all motor vehicle crash fatalities that occurred on the Saturday before St. Patrick's Day, were alcohol related,” she continued.

Only the New Year's Eve and July 4th holidays experience more alcohol related crash fatalities. In 2003, 61 percent of all New Year's Eve and 55 percent of July 4th holiday crashes were alcohol related.

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“This is data that is frightening and quite frankly unacceptable. For years, law enforcement has taken the lead in addressing impaired driving and we are asking for their efforts, once again, during the St. Patrick’s Day holiday weekend,” Barthwell continued. “Specifically, we are requesting that law enforcement takes a zero tolerance approach to impaired driving and stepping up patrols and engaging in highly-visible, highly-publicized, enforcement activity throughout the weekend,” she said.

“While we are confident law enforcement will do their part, we are also looking to the medical community to provide leadership and do their part to address impaired driving,” according to Dr. Thomas Esposito, Co –Chairperson of END and Director of Loyola University Medical Center’s Injury Analysis and Prevention Program.

“Physicians and other healthcare workers can potentially have a large role in decreasing instances of impaired driving because of their contact with patients who have alcohol and drug use problems,” Esposito continued. “Treating the alcohol use problem by implementing a protocol of alcohol screening and brief intervention can lead to reductions in impaired driving episodes, which in turn leads to fewer alcohol-related crashes,” he added.

“The screening process involves asking patients a few simple questions concerning drinking habits and consumption. An assessment is completed for patients who respond positively to one or more of the questions. The patient then undergoes a brief intervention where he/she is counseled and referred to appropriate care,” he stated.

“Studies have determined that brief interventions, which are short 5-15 minute counseling sessions designed to assist the patient confront the negative consequences of his/her alcohol consumption, have proven effective in decreasing consumption among at-risk drinkers,” Esposito concluded.

“Motorists and their loved ones also have an important role to play this St. Patrick’s Day holiday weekend,” Barthwell continued. “Designating a sober driver before the celebrating begins and making sure friends and family don’t drive drunk are just two of several, simple steps to help avoid a tragic crash or an arrest for impaired driving.” she said.

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Below is a common sense guide to ensure everyone celebrates safely:

- Designate your sober driver before the party begins and give that person your car keys;
- Don't starve yourself before or during the party. Enjoy the food as well as the drink;
- Don't drink too much or too fast. Pace yourself – eat, take breaks, alternate with non-alcoholic drinks;
- If impaired, don't get behind the wheel. Ask a sober friend for a ride home; call a cab, friend or family member to come and get you, call your local sober rides program, use mass transit, or stay where you are and sleep it off until you are sober;
- And remember, *Friends Don't Let Friends Drive Drunk*. Take the keys and never let a friend leave your sight if you think they are about to drive while impaired.

For more information, visit END's website at www.endneedlessdeath.org.

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