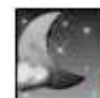




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Alcohol drives deaths

Thursday, December 15, 2005 5:37 PM CST

Ark. drunk driving fatalities total 39 percent in 2004

By Pat Hambrick

The Daily Citizen

Arkansas ranks near the nation's average for alcohol-related fatal wrecks.

Last year, 39.2 percent of all traffic fatalities in Arkansas were alcohol-related. A higher percentage of fatal accidents were alcohol related in 22 states than the 39.2 percent that Arkansas registered, according to data recently released by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Although it's a dry county, White County has a large number of drinkers — especially young ones.

Underage drinking is an issue in White County, according to Peggy Yancey of Searcy, president of Families Against Drug Addiction and a board member of White County Invested in Drug Abuse Eradication (WISE), a coalition working toward drug prevention.

Yancey said the 2004 Arkansas Prevention Needs Assessment Student Survey (sponsored by the Arkansas Department of Human Services) showed that, of the 328 White County students who participated in the survey, 25.6 percent said they used alcohol in the sixth grade, 51.2 percent by the eighth grade, 62.5 percent by the 10th grade and 78.6 percent by the 12th grade.

“As you can see, education on prevention should start before grade six, probably as early as kindergarten,” Yancey said.

With the holidays around the corner, the roads can become especially dangerous.

“While the holiday season is a time for excitement, celebration and family, it is also a



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- No, I am not a White County resident, and there is not a Relay for Life in my area
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time of impaired driving and senseless death and injury,” said Dr. Andrea Barthwell, co-chair of End Needless Death on our Roadway (END), a physician-led safety advocacy group based out of Elmhurst, Ill.

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Arkansas, along with five other states, has been placed on the “Fatal Fifteen” watch list as a state that has seen an increasing number of alcohol-related, traffic deaths. The “Fatal Fifteen” is an annual list — that does not include Arkansas— of the fifteen deadliest states in the country for impaired driving and are states in which 41 percent or more of all traffic fatalities are alcohol related. It is compiled by END and the National Safety Council.

Statistics show that in 2004, nearly 17,000 motorists were killed nationwide in alcohol-related, traffic accidents, and almost 2,000 of those were teens between the ages of 16 and 21.

Dr. Thomas Esposito, co-chair of END and director of Loyola University Medical Center’s Injury Analysis and Prevention Program, said that stricter drunk driving laws and a general change in public attitude has lowered the number of impaired driving deaths over the years, but the reduction in the rate has reached a plateau.

“Unfortunately, the levels are still unacceptably high,” said Esposito.

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