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NHTSA YOUTH MESSAGE

Alcohol-impaired driving crashes are a major health hazard facing every community in the nation. In particular, the consequences for youth and others are devastating. A Roper Poll conducted in April 1986 reported significant and positive changes in the attitudes of young people — eighty-two percent (of 16-19 year olds) indicated that they had become more aware of the dangers of drinking and driving over the past few years. This increased awareness is attributed to the influence of the media. In addition, it may be an indication that the prevention and intervention programs of NHTSA, States, local communities and citizen groups are having positive results and should be continued.

One of NHTSA's goals is to improve the health and safety of the nation's youth on America's highways. More than 40 percent of teenage deaths result from motor vehicle crashes and more than half of these fatalities involve alcohol. In fact, the leading cause of death among teenagers is alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes. This loss of life, injury and property damage is preventable.

There are many strategies that can be effective when combined in a comprehensive program. They include public information and awareness efforts, educational projects, identifying and

providing guidance to high risk youth, and legislative approaches. One legislative approach found effective in reducing alcohol-related crashes is raising to 21 the age of purchase or possession of all alcoholic beverages.

In July 1984, President Reagan signed legislation encouraging States to raise the minimum drinking age to 21 or risk losing a percentage of their highway funds. A significant number of States have complied with this law and several more have indicated their intention to do so. Presently, consuming, purchasing, selling or possessing alcoholic beverages by persons under age 21 is prohibited in 43 States and the District of Columbia. Legislation to raise the age to 21 is pending in four States.

Consuming alcoholic beverages is illegal and can be harmful for underage youth. Delaying age of first use can prevent alcohol-related problems from developing. Research has shown alcohol use by minors is associated with initial drug experiences among youth. Since improving the overall health and safety of those on our highways is our foremost concern, NHTSA has determined the need for two messages dealing with youthful drinking and driving — one prevention oriented and one intervention oriented.

The primary goal of the NHTSA youth program is to encourage promotion of the prevention message—a drug-free climate for those under age 21. In addition, while seeking to achieve the prevention goal, we realize that intervention and treatment approaches need to be available (for those who have started using alcohol and other drugs) where the focus is to eliminate potentially destructive behavior. The intervention message should be viewed as supporting, not replacing, the primary prevention goal.

NHTSA has developed two messages for young people:

Say No

NHTSA endorses programs that encourage the nonuse of alcoholic beverages for those underage. NHTSA also endorses prevention programs encouraging drug-free youth, encouraging youth to "say no" to the use of alcohol or other drugs, and programs focusing on alternative activities.

Examples of Prevention Strategies and Programs:

- o Project Graduation activities.
- o "Just Say No" programs.
- o Programs focusing on building refusal, coping and problem solving skills.
- o Parental "Safe-Home" contracts between parents ensuring alcohol and other drug-free homes for youth.
- o School policies prohibiting the use of alcohol and other drugs in school.

Other Alternatives

While the prevention goal of NHTSA is to support age "21" legislation and to reinforce the message to our youth to avoid drugs, many young people currently use alcohol and other drugs. The challenge is to reverse this by encouraging young people to make an educated choice...not to use alcohol or drugs. Another challenge is to provide strategies to prevent young people from being killed or injured in alcohol-related or drug related motor vehicle crashes. These strategies include providing safe alternatives to those who find themselves in difficult situations, when they or when a friend consumes alcohol.

Examples of intervention strategies include:

- o Conducting Dial-a-Ride programs.
- o Developing effective parent and youth contracts against alcohol drug or use.
- o Providing sleeping accommodations.
- o Providing transportation yourself or calling a cab.
- o Informing parents about the problem so they can take needed action.

Traffic safety programs for young people should balance intervention messages with clear prevention messages. Programs should encourage our youth to be free of alcohol and other drugs and provide interesting alternate social activities. In addition, intervention approaches should encourage enhanced communication among youth, parents, and educators.

Screening and referral to treatment services can be considered as a means to help our youth find chemical-free alternatives.

Several States and local communities are already implementing these and other prevention and intervention strategies. Initial evaluation results are promising. For further information about promoting alcohol-impaired driving prevention and intervention activities for young people, contact the Governor's Highway Safety Representative in the State Office, or write to:

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