

Clarion Ledger article 7-2-00

With the approach of the Fourth of July holiday, Mississippians will be busy celebrating the freedom of our nation. People across our state will enjoy traveling, cooking out, fireworks displays, patriotic concerts and ceremonies, but most important, Mississippians will be enjoying time together with family and friends.

Time spent with our loved ones is so important, and that is why I encourage all Mississippians to celebrate this holiday safely. According to Mississippi Highway Patrol (MHP) statistics, during the 1999 Fourth of July observance, eight people were killed in motor vehicle accidents. Troopers arrested 282 drivers under the influence of alcohol and made 12 drug arrests.

During this holiday weekend, major traffic arteries throughout the state will have 72 additional troopers assigned to work details. Mississippi Highway Patrol Criminal Investigation personnel will also be working throughout the Holiday weekend to respond to any criminal activity that occurs on state and federal highways

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of never consuming alcoholic beverages, or other drugs that can affect driving, before or during the operation of your vehicle. Studies indicate that consuming even a small amount of an alcoholic beverage can affect your driving to the point that a serious crash could result. Before you consider mixing drinking with driving, think about what comes from roadway crashes... the sorrow of losing a loved one or friend or the possibility of suffering permanent injuries.

Mississippi has tough DUI laws. Drunk drivers can face hefty fines, time in jail and sharp increases in motor vehicle insurance premiums, or even loss of coverage.

Every available unit of the MHP will be on roads and highways over the Fourth of July observance. Stepped up enforcement will also include extra radar details and road blocks throughout the state looking for various traffic violations, impaired drivers, felons and any other illegal activity.

Some people might believe that safe drivers don't have to worry about motor vehicle crashes, but even the safest of drivers can be involved in crashes caused by other motorists.

A safety belt or child protective device such as a safety seat can be the difference between life and death or minor and serious injuries in motor vehicle crashes. I personally can attest to this fact. As you probably know, I was involved in a serious crash when I was serving as Lieutenant Governor. I am fully convinced that a safety belt saved my life.

Even though buckling up has proven to save lives, many motorists are not taking this step. In last year's fatalities, 74.5% of the drivers, 66% of the front-seat passengers and 75% of the back-seat passengers were NOT using safety belts or child protective devices.

Yes, tragedy on our roadways can be prevented. I urge every Mississippi motorist to abide by all safety laws, never to mix drinking with driving, have all vehicle occupants buckled up and ensure that all children ride in the back seat. Strict enforcement of roadway safety laws are helping, but, in the final analysis, YOU are the one who can do the most to prevent the human suffering that comes from crashes on Mississippi roadways.

Have a wonderful and SAFE Fourth of July holiday.