

Eisenhower State Office Building
700 SW Harrison
Topeka, KS 66603



phone: 785-296-3585
fax: 785-368-7415
www.ksdot.org

Julie Lorenz, Secretary

Laura Kelly, Governor

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For more information:

Gary Herman

785.296.0294

Gary.Herman@ks.gov

Sober first - ring in the holidays responsibly

The lights are up, the gifts are ordered. But have plans been made to celebrate the holidays safely? This year, as more people gather in homes, restaurants and bars, the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) is telling Kansas drivers: Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over.

The 2021 campaign, in partnership with U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), is designed to keep drivers, passengers and other drivers/pedestrians safe from impaired driving crashes and fatalities. Impaired driving involves operating a vehicle while impaired by a substance like marijuana, other illicit drugs, some prescribed or over-the-counter medicines or alcohol.

"Don't let impaired driving jeopardize your life or the lives of others," said KDOT Secretary Julie Lorenz. "Plan ahead and make it a safe, sober holiday celebration. Coming home safe and alive to loved ones is the best holiday gift you can give others – and yourself."

The Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over awareness campaign runs from Dec. 15 through Jan. 1, 2022. But there is more involved than raising awareness. Law enforcement officials will be out in greater numbers during this time, making arrests that can lead to jail time.

Nationwide, peak Christmas and New Year's holiday periods result in the highest drunk-driving-related fatalities than any other holiday period, according to NHTSA. In the United States, drunk driving is marked by a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) at or above .08 grams per deciliter [g/dL].

"In 2019, there were a total of 2,138 alcohol-related crashes in Kansas," said KDOT Behavioral Safety Manager Gary Herman. "In fact, an alcohol-related crash occurs every four hours in Kansas."

Sadly, more than 1,000 Kansans lost their lives to alcohol-related crashes between 2010 and 2019. Considering the driving dangers associated with drug use and the increase in holiday parties, the risks increase dramatically, Herman said.

KDOT suggests planning ahead to celebrate safely. Designate a sober driver before traveling, call a ride-share service or use public transportation before celebrating. Check to see if sober ride programs are offered in the committee during the holidays. Also, prevent others from driving impaired by taking their keys, providing alternative transportation or reporting them to law enforcement.

The “Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over” campaign is funded by federal traffic safety funds administered by KDOT. For more information about traveling safety this holiday season, visit www.KTSRO.org.

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