



1970 West Broad Street
P.O. Box 182081
Columbus, Ohio 43218-2081
www.statepatrol.ohio.gov
www.publicsafety.ohio.gov

Ted Strickland, Governor

STATE OF OHIO

Henry Guzmán, Director

MEDIA RELEASE

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**Contacts: Lt. Tony Bradshaw, OSHP (614)752-2792 or
Lindsay Komlanc, ODPS Media Relations Director (614) 752-4325**

ODPS Urges Patience While Driving in Increased Thanksgiving Holiday Traffic

All drivers and occupants encouraged to buckle up, every trip, every time.

COLUMBUS – In anticipation of heavy traffic during the Thanksgiving holiday, the Ohio Department of Public Safety (ODPS) is urging motorists to contribute to roadway safety by planning ahead for increased drive time and making safety their first priority while driving.

To help motorists and passengers remember to be safety-conscious, the Ohio State Highway Patrol and more than 70 local law enforcement agencies across the state will be out in force between now and Nov. 25 looking for aggressive, impaired or otherwise un-safe drivers. If pulled over for another violation, those not wearing seat belts will be ticketed. The local efforts are funded and coordinated by ODPS' Governor's Highway Safety Office, which also promotes educational programs, coalition-building efforts and public information campaigns.

"The Ohio Department of Public Safety is committed to working with our partners around the state to reach out to all Ohioans to encourage them to drive safe and sober during this holiday season and every day of the year," said ODPS Director Henry Guzmán. "Wearing a seat belt costs you nothing, and may save your life or protect you from a life-altering injury. So as you hit the road this Thanksgiving, remember to buckle up, whether you're traveling across town or across the state."

Last year during the Thanksgiving holiday weekend, 22 people were killed and 21 people were injured in crashes on Ohio's roadways. Only six of the people killed were wearing the safety belts available to them at the time of the crash. Of the 22 fatal crashes, 10 were alcohol-related. The most recent data available from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration show that 31,415 passenger vehicle occupants died in crashes across the nation in 2005, and more than half of them, 16,172, were not wearing seat belts.

Regular seat belt use is the single most effective way to protect people and reduce fatalities in motor vehicle crashes. Research has shown that when lap/shoulder belts are used properly, the risk of fatal injury to front seat passenger car occupant is reduced by 45 percent, and the risk of moderate-to-critical injury is reduced by 50 percent.

"We all share the responsibility of making this a safe holiday on Ohio roadways by obeying all traffic laws, driving with courtesy, and by drivers insisting that every occupant buckles their safety belt before traveling," Colonel Richard H. Collins, Patrol superintendent, said. "As a member of the motoring public, you can help save lives by reporting unsafe and aggressive drivers to law enforcement. If you see a disabled vehicle or an unsafe driver, please call the Patrol or local law enforcement for assistance."

Troopers recommend that motorists contact the Patrol by calling 1-877-7-PATROL when they see a disabled vehicle or unsafe driver. The Patrol recommends that in the event of a vehicle breakdown, turn on hazard warning lights, safely position the vehicle as far off the road as possible and open the hood. Place a "help" sign in the rear window, and stay inside the vehicle until help arrives. If a cell phone is available, dial 1-877-7-PATROL for assistance and the call will be directed to the nearest Patrol post.

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