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SIXTEEN PEOPLE KILLED ON VIRGINIA HIGHWAYS DURING 2007 THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

State Police Preparing for Ninth Phase of Operation Air, Land & Speed

RICHMOND – Despite ongoing efforts to reduce traffic fatalities around the Commonwealth, the number of fatal crashes remained high for the 2007 Thanksgiving holiday. Preliminary totals reveal 16 people were killed in 15 traffic crashes during the five-day statistical counting period. Traffic crashes during the 2006 Thanksgiving holiday period also claimed 16 lives.

Among those who died, during the extended holiday, was a 2-year-old North Carolina boy. Two additional victims were motorcyclists and one was a pedestrian. Seat belt restraints were not used in eight of the crashes. Alcohol was an unknown factor in two of the crashes.

Two of the fatal collisions happened in Buckingham County and another two occurred in Goochland County. The remaining crashes took place in the counties of Amherst, Augusta, Bland, Charles City, Fairfax, Fauquier, Fluvanna, Lee, Lunenburg and Sussex, and the city of Chesapeake.

"At 924 traffic deaths statewide as of today, Virginia is only a matter of weeks away from potentially reaching 1,000 by the end of the year," said Colonel W. Steven Flaherty, Superintendent of the Virginia State Police. "Every day people get behind the wheel of a vehicle and yet few realize that they are taking their own lives, their passengers' and other motorists' lives into their own hands. State police cannot emphasize enough the importance of putting safety first and preventing one's self from becoming Virginia's next traffic fatality."

In an effort to reduce all traffic fatalities, state police is working in partnership with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) and Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to improve traffic safety. The Highway Safety Challenge is a joint effort to try and cut the number of highway fatalities by 100 by 2010. The "Are You Virginia's Next Traffic Fatality?" campaign points out factors contributing to motor vehicle fatalities and offers safety reminders: Buckle up; Avoid distractions; Share the road; Drive drug & alcohol free; Obey speed limits.

To find out more about taking the Highway Safety Challenge, visit the Web site at www.safeVAhighways.org.



As part of the Virginia State Police holiday enforcement safety strategy, troopers participated in the Combined Accident Reduction Effort, or *Operation C.A.R.E.* The state-sponsored, national program is designed to decrease crashes, fatalities and injuries caused by speeding, impaired driving and the failure to use occupant restraints. The traffic safety program is conducted during the year's national holidays.

The 2007 Thanksgiving statistical counting period began Wednesday, Nov. 21, and ended at midnight on Sunday, Nov. 25. Seventy-five percent of the Virginia State Police work force worked this Thanksgiving weekend as part of Operation C.A.R.E.

The 2007 Operation C.A.R.E. program yielded the following summonses and/or arrests by Virginia State Police statewide: 11,869 for speeding; 2,918 for reckless driving; 159 for driving under the influence; 918 for not wearing safety belts; 222 for not using child restraints; and 5,736 for other hazardous violations.

Operation Air, Land and Speed Phase IX

During the busy holiday season, Virginia State Police is taking steps to keep motorists safer with another *Operation Air, Land & Speed* safety campaign. On Thursday, Nov. 29, and Friday, Nov. 30, 2007, drivers can expect to see an increase of troopers both in the air and on the road along Interstates 64 and 66. This will be the first time this concentrated traffic safety effort has focused on Interstate 66 in Northern Virginia.

Operation Air, Land & Speed IX will utilize troopers, supervisors, aviation personnel and motor carrier troopers.

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