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Traffic Safety and Law Enforcement Remind Public That DUI Doesn't Just Mean Booze

SACRAMENTO, CA – The issue of drivers under the influence of drugs (DUID), rather than alcohol, is an increasingly serious problem in California. Faced with more instances of DUID, state and local officials are reiterating the message that “DUI Doesn't Just Mean Booze.”

The message takes on increased importance as the state begins licensing commercial nonmedical cannabis sales on January 1, 2018, under provisions of Proposition 64, the Adult Use of Marijuana Act. Alcohol-impaired driving is still the most serious problem on our roadways, but the percentage of drivers in fatal collisions who have other impairing substances in their system keeps rising.

“It has taken more than 35 years to convince the vast majority of the public that driving under the influence of alcohol is dangerous, illegal, and socially unacceptable,” said Rhonda Craft, Director of the Office of Traffic Safety. “With more dying on our roadways every day, we can't afford to take that long when it comes to driving under the influence of prescription medications, marijuana, illicit drugs and even some over-the-counter medications.”

From 2005 to 2015, the percentage of drivers in fatal collisions who had an impairing drug other than alcohol in their system increased from 26.2 percent to 42.6 percent, according to statistics from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. As far back as 2012, a roadside survey in California showed more drivers tested positive for drugs that may impair driving (14 percent) than did for alcohol (7.3 percent). Of the drugs, cannabis was most prevalent, at 7.4 percent, slightly more than alcohol.

In addition to alcohol or cannabis, a driver could be subject to a DUI arrest if they are under the influence of prescription medications like sleep aids, tranquilizers, barbiturates, opiates and other pain killers, anti-depressants, and even over-the-counter allergy or cough medications when they impair your ability to drive a vehicle.

“Just like drunk driving, driving under the influence of drugs is not only dangerous, it is a crime,” CHP Acting Commissioner Warren Stanley said. “What caused the impairment does not matter. In short, “drive high, get a DUI.”

In the face of more drug-impaired drivers on the road, the CHP and local law enforcement are training more officers in Advanced Roadside Impaired Driving Enforcement and Drug Recognition Evaluation. The advanced training augments the Standardized Field Sobriety Test to help identify what substances other than alcohol a driver may be impaired by.

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Acting Commissioner Stanley and Director Craft note alternatives to driving impaired, including calling a taxi or a sober friend or family member, using public transportation, or ride-hailing services. If you see a driver who appears to be impaired, do not hesitate to call 9-1-1.

During December, the Office of Traffic Safety ran public awareness announcements concerning prescription medication DUI. Starting December 27 and running through January, the emphasis switches to one illustrating that no matter your age or your reasons for consuming cannabis, you should never drive while high.

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