



Aug. 18, 2022
For immediate release

Rice County officers plan extra DWI patrols through Labor Day

Beginning Friday, Rice County law enforcement will join agencies across Minnesota for one final summertime push to rid the roads of impaired drivers.

The campaign, which includes extra patrols, runs from Aug. 19- Sept. 5, Labor Day., the end of what's considered the 100 deadliest days on Minnesota roads.

According to the state Department of Public Safety, 203 people died in drunken driving-related crashes during the last five summers (May-August) and more than one of every five deaths (23%) on Minnesota roads is related to drunken driving.

In 2021, officers made 257 DWI arrests in Rice County, more than the 233 in all of 2020 and only slightly less than the 268 in 2019. While it's far less than the 400+ arrests seen in the late 1980s and into mid-2000s, a significant number of people are still risking their lives and the lives of others by getting behind the wheel when they shouldn't.

"The best way to avoid making a bad choice after you have been consuming alcoholic beverages is to plan ahead," said Rice County Sheriff Jesse Thomas. Leave your vehicle at home and arrange for a ride home before you head out for the night. This will eliminate the temptation of driving after you have had too much to drink."

Alcohol continues to be a major factor in the county's traffic fatalities. Of the three Rice County traffic fatalities so far in 2022, alcohol was present in one, according to preliminary state data. From Jan. 1 to Aug. 15, Rice County has seen 12 crashes resulting in serious injuries, Thomas said. Of those, four involved alcohol.

Driving while impaired doesn't just cover alcohol, it includes impairment from legal and illegal drugs.

Drugged driving accounted for 6,769 incidents statewide from 2012-16 compared with 15,133 from 2017-21. That's a 123% increase over five years, according to DPS.

"We've seen a spike in DWI arrests this year and a pretty significant increase in recent years with the number of drivers who are being arrested for drug-impaired driving," said DPS-OTS Director Mike Hanson. "Drivers need to



be aware that cold medicine, prescription medication, recently legalized THC edible products or any other drug can contribute to impairment and a DWI. Driving while impaired can lead to an arrest, or even worse, serious injury or death. Don't take the chance. Always plan for a sober ride."

In addition to the Rice County Sheriff's Office, the Faribault, Lonsdale and Northfield Police departments are participating in the campaign, which is sponsored by the Department of Public Safety Office of Traffic Safety,

Contact:

Jesse J. Thomas, Rice County Sheriff

jthomas@co.rice.mn.us

507-334-4391

Suzy Rook, Communications Coordinator

srook@co.rice.mn.us

507-384-6509

MAKE A PLAN

- Designate a sober driver, use a safe, alternative transportation option or stay at the location of the celebration.
- Offer to be a designated driver or be available to pick up a loved one anytime, anywhere. If you see an impaired person about to get behind the wheel, get them a safe ride home.
- If you plan to drive, refrain from drugs, whether legally or illegally obtained.
- If you don't yet know how a medication will affect your judgment, coordination and reaction time, either have someone else drive or wait to take it until after you get home.
- Buckle up. It's the best defense against impaired drivers.

Source: Minnesota Department of Public Safety