Police Release Post-Christmas Holiday Traffic Statistics; Prepare for New Year's Weekend

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Four die in Oregon crashes, 59 arrested for drunk driving, one driver involved in two separate crashes three miles apartTraffic-related deaths were slightly higher this year, and drunk driving arrests by Oregon State Police (OSP) troopers were definitely higher, according to preliminary information gathered related to the Christmas holiday period. OSP, Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) and local police agencies are preparing for this weekend's New Year's Holiday extended weekend. Preliminary information from ODOT's Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS), between 6:00 p.m., Friday, December 22, and 11:59 p.m., Monday, December 25, show four people died in two separate fatal traffic crashes over the 78-hour holiday period. Three people died last year, and according to FARS statistics an average of 4 fatalities have occurred during the Christmas holiday period during the last ten years. Following is a brief review of this year's two fatal crashes in Oregon during the holiday period: * On Friday, December 22 about 11:45 p.m., three people died in a Redmond-area traffic crash. Redmond Police Department is the lead investigating agency and an OSP crash reconstructionist is assisting with the investigation. * On Monday, December 25 shortly after midnight, one person died in a Salem-area single vehicle traffic crash. Marion County Sheriff's Office is the lead-investigating agency. There were no reported fatal crashes on any Oregon freeways or state highways. Oregon State Police troopers were not the lead agency in the investigation of any fatal traffic crashes during this year's Christmas holiday period. Preliminary information from the OSP Patrol Services Division shows OSP troopers arrested 59 people for Driving Under the Influence of Intoxicants (DUII) during the holiday period. This was an increase of nearly 33% over last year when troopers arrested 44 people for DUII. The OSP Coos Bay office troopers arrested 7 people for DUII, including six arrests on Saturday, December 23rd. OSP offices in Portland, Salem, Springfield, and Bend each reported 6 DUII arrests. An example of some OSP reported incidents of note include: * On Friday, December 22 at about 9:50 p.m., OSP Springfield troopers attempted to stop a Volvo four-door with three occupants on Prairie Road at Beltline Highway. The Volvo failed to yield and attempted to elude troopers. Eugene police joined troopers in trying to get the vehicle to stop as it continued to elude. The vehicle continued through the grass at Maury Jacob Park, crossed over the Greenway footbridge at Valley River mall, and drove north on the bike path until it hit a fence. The three occupants jumped out to flee on foot. The driver was chased on foot until he jumped into the Willamette River where he decided to surrender. The two female passengers were also detained. The driver, Timothy Wayne Emra, 30, of Junction City, was lodged in Lane County Jail for felony attempt to elude in a vehicle, misdemeanor attempt to elude on foot, reckless driving, two counts of recklessly endangering another person, and first-degree criminal mischief. He was also cited for driving while suspended and possession of less than an ounce of marijuana. One female passenger, 24-year old Lindsey Kruesi of Eugene, was arrested on a probation violation warrant. The third passenger was not lodged but charges will be pending. * On Saturday, December 23 at about 2:15 a.m., an OSP Salem-area trooper investigated a single vehicle crash on Highway 211 in the Molalla area in which a 2000 Volkwagon with a single occupant left the highway and sheared off a power pole, dropping power lines across the highway resulting in its closure until lines were cleared. The driver, 23-year old Timateo De La Cruz of Molalla, was transported by ambulance to Silverton Hospital for treatment of minor injuries. De La Cruz was arrested upon release and is being charged with DUII and reckless driving. * On Saturday, December 23, OSP Baker City-area troopers reported being very busy responding to multiple crashes between 5:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. east of Baker City towards Ontario. Most crashes were resulted in minor injuries, but driving too fast for the conditions was the major contributing factor on snow/ice covered highways. * On Monday, December 25, OSP Bend-area troopers investigated two separate crashes involving the same driver three miles apart. The first crash occurred about 3:30 p.m. when Gilmar R. Barillas Mejia, 24, of Salem, was eastbound on Highway 22 near milepost 75, lost control on the ice and struck the rear left side of a parked Ford Ranger pickup whose driver was outside putting on chains. As the driver of the pickup was attempting to exchange information, Barillas Mejia left the scene eastbound and drove three miles before losing control again and crashing head-on with a Chevrolet Suburban. There were no injuries in either crash, and Barillas Mejia was cited for careless driving and failure to leave name and address at scene of traffic crash (hit & run). According to ODOT, alcohol has been a factor in 41 percent of Oregon traffic deaths around the New Year's and Christmas holiday periods during the last ten years. Six people died

in five separate traffic crashes during last year's 78-hour New Year's holiday period, and OSP troopers arrested 88 people for DUII. With the increase of people traveling on our highways during this week and the upcoming New Year's Holiday weekend, OSP and ODOT recommend the following travel safety tips to help get you safely to your destination: * Expect the unexpected. Be informed and prepared when traveling on any of our highways. * When traveling anywhere, plan ahead and taken known routes if possible. Our weather has been changing quickly and sometimes without warning. For road conditions in Oregon, call 5-1-1 or (800) 977-ODOT (6368). Outside Oregon, dial (503) 588-2941. Visiting TripCheck.com on the Internet provides information on road and weather conditions, incidents and traffic delays, and links to numerous cameras on many mountain passes and major routes. * Take the time to keep up current and future weather conditions in the area you are traveling. Especially if going to or through higher elevations and mountain passes, areas where your vehicle needs to have appropriate traction tires or devices. * If considering a remote route that you have never traveled on, don't hesitate to contact available road and weather condition phone number or Internet resources, or contact police or highway department officials. * Prepare an emergency kit to place in your car for longer trips and keep track of how much fuel is in your tank, especially if traveling unfamiliar routes or into remote locations. * Let friends and family know what routes you plan to take when on a trip, keeping them updated and let them know if these plans change. * Drive to the conditions. If it's icy or wet, increase your following distance and reduce your speed. Use your headlights to improve not only your visibility, but also so others can see your vehicle. * In bad weather, don't use cruise control. For those who may mix holiday celebrations with alcohol, OSP and ODOT recommend the following tips to help make your journey safer: * Don't drink and drive, and don't ride with anyone who has had too much to drink. * Volunteer to be a designated driver. * If you see someone you know who has had too much to drink to drive, take his or her keys. * If hosting a gathering, provide non-alcoholic beverages. * Use public transit or local drive-home services provided by taxis and other companies. * Always use safety restraints. * Report any suspected impaired driving by calling 1-800-24DRUNK (800-243-7865) or 9-1-1. For more information about the national effort to battle impaired driving, visit www.StopImpairedDriving.Org.

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