

Traffic enforcement partnerships improve safety, get criminals off the road

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

Hundreds of criminals on the road got the "red light" in 2006, thanks to a five-county, multi-agency effort. Officers arrested 273 people for a variety of misdemeanor and felony crimes during the Multi-Agency Traffic Team Project, a partnership between the Oregon Department of Transportation and 27 law enforcement agencies. The project, coordinated by ODOT's Safety Division, provided \$257,000 to support team patrols focusing on primary crash-causing violations, such as speeding. But law-breaking motorists weren't the only people officers encountered during their stops. "In addition to issuing numerous hazardous driving citations, officers were able to get criminals off the road," said ODOT's Law Enforcement Program Manager Steve Vitolo. "It's pretty straightforward" criminals have to drive to and from crime scenes, and that makes proactive traffic law-enforcement like this that much more important. The six-month-long campaign resulted in 14,124 citations and contributed to an overall six percent reduction in highway fatalities. Nearly 5,900 drivers received citations for speeding during the program, and the patrols will be out in force again over the upcoming Memorial Day holiday. "Partnerships like these are key to keeping people safe on our highways and in our communities," said Matt Garrett, ODOT director. "We're extremely proud of the hard work law enforcement folks are doing out there, not just in the overtime efforts, but every day." County and city agencies coordinated efforts from March " Sept. 2006 to target several areas of local concern. They also focused on the top three driver errors: speeding, following too close and red light/stop sign violations. During the 5,020 hours of overtime enforcement, there were 197 misdemeanor arrests (87 DUII drivers) and 76 felony arrests. Law enforcement agencies came from Lane, Marion, Clackamas, Washington and Multnomah counties. "Traffic safety problems within a given county are addressed by a team of dedicated professionals working side by side in problem areas" regardless of jurisdiction," said Vitolo. "It's an outstanding partnership all the way around." Here is the breakdown for the teams involved in this effort:

13,673 traffic stops (2.72 stops per overtime hour, on average)

14,124 citations issued

5,893 speed citations

858 safety belt

677 suspended drivers were cited/towed

684 traffic control device (red light / stop sign violations)

319 following too close

5,165 warnings

197 misdemeanor arrests (87 of which were DUII drivers)

76 felony arrests

"Clearly, this high visibility, team-based approach to traffic law enforcement is working for Oregonians," Vitolo said.

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