

Public Safety Chiefs Urge Public to Be Safer this Holiday Season

At the Montgomery County Public Safety Headquarters today, Police Chief Tom Manger and Fire Chief Scott Goldstein urged community members to “Be Safer this Holiday Season,” and to “Be Seen, Be Alert, and Be Responsible.” Already this year in Montgomery County, there have been 33 fatal traffic collisions in which 34 people lost their lives.

“The fourth quarter of the year, which includes the holiday season, is one of the most dangerous times of the year for drivers and pedestrians,” said Chief Manger. “Traffic collisions increase with, on average, 135 pedestrians involved in those collisions. This traditionally has been the highest quarter of the year for traffic crashes and we need to do everything we can to prevent these tragedies.”

“Any pedestrian fatality or injury is one too many,” said Chief Goldstein. “Our first responders see firsthand the correlation between distractions and collisions. Drivers, look out for pedestrians especially in hard-to-see conditions such as nighttime or inclement weather. Pedestrians, follow the rules of the road and pay attention to traffic. Whether on foot or behind the wheel, we need to work together, look out for each other and curb the distractions.”

Joining the Chiefs to support a safer holiday season were: the chair of the County’s Pedestrian, Bicycle and Traffic Safety Advisory Committee Darrel Droblich, the director of the MCPD Traffic Division Captain Tom Didone and the chair of the County’s Commission on People with Disabilities Seth Morgan, M.D.

“Do yourself and your family a favor this holiday season and think about your responsibilities on roads, crosswalks and bike paths,” said Droblich. “Don’t trust the other guy to do the right thing; be ready to yield the right-of-way. Let’s also give our County’s police and emergency personnel a break this holiday season by all doing our part to be safer.”

County officials, members of law enforcement and traffic safety activists encourage community members to reduce traffic fatalities with the following strategies:

Be Seen: Think about how to be more visible when walking during morning and evening periods of darkness. Consider purchasing a light-colored winter coat or wearing a white scarf and gloves. Look for reflective and/or flashing accessories in bicycle supply shops that can be easily worn with a coat. Pedestrians should never assume that a driver can see them, just because they can see the vehicle.

Be Alert: Always give full attention when walking or driving. Maryland is a Hands-Free state, no texting or even holding a cell phone while you are driving. Distracted driving continues to be a leading cause of collisions. When walking by a roadway or when crossing streets, don’t wear ear buds and don’t be looking down at a cell phone. Holiday shoppers are particularly encouraged to be aware of one another in parking lots. Over the past four years, approximately 25 percent of the County’s pedestrian collisions have occurred in parking lots.

Be Responsible: Don’t Drink and Drive and don’t host a party for teens that includes alcohol. During the holidays, County law enforcement agencies work together to deploy a Holiday Alcohol Task Force to reduce the incidents of drunk and drugged driving. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says that due to the increased use of alcohol during the holidays, there are more impaired drivers on the roads and that results in an increase in the occurrence of fatal alcohol-related collisions. Task force members will also be responding to reports of underage drinking parties. Adults and parents are asked to

support zero tolerance of underage drinking. This year the task force began on November 15 and will continue through January 9, 2016.

Both police and fire rescue personnel work together on the “Shop with a Cop or Firefighter” campaign. Officers and firefighters go to busy shopping center parking lots across the County to provide extra security and safety awareness. They’ll be handing out bright yellow reusable shopping bags to aid in the “Be Seen” efforts. The bags contain information about parking lot safety and respecting the designated disability parking spaces. The Shop with a Cop police officers will also be conducting enforcement of laws regulating the use of designated disability parking spaces.

The Heads Up in Parking Lots safety message:

Drivers:

- Don’t drive distractedly – it’s illegal to hold a phone or text while driving.
- Don’t assume pedestrians see you.
- Be especially cautious backing out of a space.
- Slow down! Parking lots are not speedways.

Pedestrians:

- Stop talking on the phone and texting while walking. Take out the ear buds.
- Don’t assume drivers see you.
- Don’t walk behind a vehicle that is backing out.
- Be aware and constantly look out for moving vehicles.

Respect the Space reminders:

- Drivers are reminded that it is illegal to park a vehicle without disability tags or license in a designated disability parking space. The fine for Montgomery County is \$250.
- The individual who was issued a placard or plate must be transported in the vehicle for the vehicle to legally park in a designated disability parking space.
- Parking in a striped area/access aisle adjacent to and between disability spaces is also against the law. Those striped areas allow room for wheelchair lifts to load and unload passengers.
- Disability parking spaces are located in all parking lots and garages within parking districts for the exclusive use of those with disability tags or placards. Even when vacant, they are never, even for a matter of minutes, for use by anyone else.
- If you see a vehicle without a disability tag or license plate parked in a designated disability parking space, call the police non-emergency number, 301-279-8000.

Holiday Enforcements:

Alcohol Holiday Task Force

More information at: <http://bit.ly/1NjiaZ2> .

- Members of the media are encouraged to participate in a ride-along with a task force officer during this holiday season. A date designated for a media ride-along has been scheduled for the night of November 25 (the day before Thanksgiving). Call the police Public Information Office at 240-773-5030, option 4, to make arrangements.
- Respect the Space enforcement conducted in area shopping centers by officers detailed to the Shop with a Cop initiative.
- Weather-permitting there will be approximately 40 pedestrian enforcement details during the month of December.
- Regular distracted driving and seat belt compliance enforcement continues during the holidays.