

ATLANTIC COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

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Prosecutor

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release
June 10, 2010
2 Page (s)

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MAYS LANDING— Atlantic County became the first in the state to receive a \$37,000 grant from the state Division of Highway Traffic Safety to help local law enforcement officers combat impaired drivers by funding Drug Recognition Experts to assist them in their ongoing battle against drunk and drugged drivers, Atlantic County Prosecutor Ted Housel announced today.

Prosecutor Housel and Director of Highway Traffic Safety Pamela Fischer were flanked by New Jersey State Police Troopers and local police officers who are specially trained as Drug Recognition Experts. These DREs were supported by law enforcement officers throughout the county ranging from the Sheriff to municipal police chiefs.

Both the Prosecutor and Director stated that as parents of teenagers they worry about drivers who operate vehicles not only under the influence of alcohol, but also under the influence of illegal as well as prescription drugs. Because of the availability of DREs more drugged drivers will be identified and taken off of the streets.

“This is a pilot program; the first of its kind in the state. The grant will allow us to pool our limited resources enabling local police departments to call in Drug Recognition Experts when a driver appears to be under the influence of something other than alcohol,” Prosecutor Housel said.

Director Fischer stated, “While we’ve made significant progress in combating drunk driving, we’re now faced with another difficult challenge - drugged driving. In 2008 in Atlantic County, 1,732 individuals were arrested for DWI, while 2,303 arrests were made for drug-related offenses. This pilot program will help law enforcement agencies more effectively address this issue by sharing both resources and the expertise needed to identify drugged drivers and remove them from the road.”

Fischer added that drugged driving is becoming a particularly alarming trend among younger drivers, who believe that drug use cannot be as easily detected as alcohol.

“We know that teen drivers understand the dangers of drinking and driving,” Fischer added. “But unfortunately, that same message is not resonating with young people when it comes to drugs. Many simply do not understand the potentially deadly

consequences of drugged driving. This new initiative sends a strong message to all drivers, both new and experienced, that drugged driving is a dangerous and potentially deadly driving behavior that simply will not be tolerated on our roadways.”

Captain Chris Simmermon of the New Jersey State Police Troop A stated that the State Police who are responsible for training DREs statewide are committed to working with Atlantic County on the pilot project in order to get it implemented in all of the other counties. He explained that there are 63 DREs in the State Police. He emphasized that DREs are essential in detecting if a motorist is under the influence and stated that with specially trained officers available to detect a drugged driver, the roads will be safer and lives will be saved.

Major Lou Klock, New Jersey State Police Troop A Commander who was unable to attend, stated that drivers under the influence of drugs may be harder to detect without advanced training, but they are just as dangerous on our roadways. This effort strengthens law enforcement's ability to rid the roads of intoxicated drivers, and that makes everyone safer.

Anyone with information involving serious crimes is asked to call the Atlantic County Prosecutor's Office at 609-909-7800 or go to the Prosecutor's Office Web site at <http://www.acpo.org/tips.html> and provide information by filling out the form anonymously on the Submit a Tip page. People can also call Crime Stoppers at 609-652-1234 or 1-800-658-8477 (TIPS) or visit the Crime Stoppers Website at <http://www.crimestoppersatlantic.com/>. Crime Stoppers offers cash rewards for information leading to the arrest and indictment of those who commit crimes in Atlantic County.