

## **Drive Sober Campaign Kickoff Event Script**

Dr. Steven Cliff, NHTSA Administrator

**Wednesday, August 17, 2022**

### **AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY**

Good morning. I'm Dr. Steve Cliff, Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Today we're launching our annual *Drive Sober* campaign and national mobilization. We're also releasing our fatality early estimates for the first quarter of 2022. And, I'm sorry to report, the overall numbers are still moving in the wrong direction.

When everyday life came to a halt in March 2020, risky behaviors skyrocketed, and traffic fatalities spiked.

We'd hoped these trends were limited to 2020, but sadly, they aren't.

We project that 9,560 people died in motor vehicle traffic crashes in the first quarter of this year. This is an increase of about 7% compared to the first quarter of last year, making this the highest number of first-quarter fatalities since 2002.

Because these are early estimates, we don't have breakdowns by category. However, we consistently see that about a third of these crashes are due to driving while impaired.

Now is the time for all of us to double down on our commitment to traffic safety, including using effective messaging, like our impaired-driving campaigns. Public education, supported by visible consequences, is a proven combination and the fastest way we can change behaviors and save lives.

We know that 1 person lost their life every 45 minutes in 2020 due to impaired driving. Almost everyone knows of someone killed in an impaired-driving crash, and we want to prevent other families from experiencing these tragedies.

I want to show you just how many families, friends, and communities have felt the consequences across our country.

Ten thousand, seven hundred and ten people died in alcohol-impaired driving crashes in 2018. That is more people than the entire population of Sedona, Arizona.

And drunk-driving deaths wiped out the equivalent of another small city in 2019.

Because 10,196 people, more than the entire population of Fairfield, Iowa, lost their lives to drunk-driving crashes.

How many cities' worth of people are we willing to lose?

11,654 people lost their lives in 2020 from impaired driving. That's equivalent to another small city the size of Cocoa Beach, Florida.

All these lives were lost to a completely preventable tragedy. Think about the impact of just three years of loss due to drunk-driving deaths.

It's a bit terrifying how these points all blend—there are so many of them. NHTSA and our partners are committed to saving lives on our nation's roads.

Our annual *Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over* high-visibility enforcement campaign, which begins today and runs through Labor Day, focuses on improving safety for all road users by preventing impaired driving. Through the efforts of our partners at the state level, including law enforcement, we have saved lives through campaigns like this one.

These campaigns are all part of a comprehensive safety strategy to prevent traffic deaths, and they work. For example, new research shows a positive and significant increase in seat belt use during enforcement campaigns. These efforts produced, on average, a 3.5-percentage-point improvement in seat belt use rates. That's about 400 people, and possibly 400 lives saved.

States can individually consider even stronger action like Utah did when it lowered its impaired-driving legal limit to .05%. Research shows that Utah's crash rate dropped substantially in 2019, the first year under the lower legal limit, and the fatality rate decreased by 18.3%.

At the Federal level, reaching zero deaths on our roads is a top priority for the Biden-Harris Administration. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law makes significant investments in highway safety.

The law also focuses on the promise of technology to address the impaired driving problem. It requires NHTSA to continue supporting the DADSS program that just provided design plans, so its new breath alcohol detection technology can be licensed for use in commercial vehicles for the first time.

NHTSA is proud to have partnered with the Automotive Coalition for Traffic Safety and helped fund this groundbreaking research. We are also excited about the continuing evolution of various automotive technologies to understand what other technological solutions can be brought to bear on this issue.

Earlier this year, Secretary Pete Buttigieg unveiled the National Roadway Safety Strategy, which aims to save lives by leveraging road design and other infrastructure interventions and focusing on safer speed limit setting, education, and equitable traffic enforcement.

Today – and every day – we want to remind you to drive sober.

We want to remind you to drive sober this Labor Day weekend and every day.

We need your help: Remind your friends and neighbors to drive sober, and if they're impaired, to arrange for a sober ride home. We all have a part to play in making smart choices and saving lives.

This Labor Day weekend, and every day, we want Americans to make responsible choices. You can drive sober, or you can face the consequences. And those consequences could cost you your life – or the lives of others on our roads.

We hope people will think twice and make the smart choice to drive sober or arrange for a sober ride home if they're impaired.

With that, we'll conclude today's news conference. Thanks again to all our speakers for their time, and thank you, our audience, for joining us today.