



Nov. 20, 2023
For immediate release

Holiday DWI enforcement kicks off, officials urge drivers to plan a sober ride

Rice County law enforcement agencies kick off their annual holiday DWI enforcement wave on Wednesday, Thanksgiving Eve, an important effort to reduce impaired driving and keep our roads safe.

The campaign, which includes law enforcement agencies across the state, runs through New Year's Eve.

This has been a particularly deadly year in Rice County – with 12 traffic fatalities – the highest number since 2008. Only eight Minnesota counties have more traffic deaths in 2023, and county officials want to ensure that climbs no higher.

The added enforcement, paid for with a grant from the Minnesota Department of Public Safety to Rice County law enforcement agencies, puts additional officers on the road looking for drivers impaired by any substance, including cannabis. Though legal to use and possess, driving under its influence remains illegal.

Similar to laws regarding transporting alcohol, open containers of cannabis or products containing THC must be stored in a vehicle's trunk.

Wednesday evening's kickoff includes featured speaker, Rice County Attorney Brian Mortenson.

Faribault Police Officer Jacob Charlton, one of four drug recognition experts in Rice County, will be honored for making 59 DWI arrests in the prior year. It's the second consecutive year Charlton has made the most DWI arrests in the county. This summer he was recognized as a Minnesota DWI Enforcer All Star.

While the number of traffic deaths in Rice County this year is troubling, the state has seen a 32% reduction in traffic fatalities between 2003 and 2022, due in part to the Toward Zero Deaths traffic safety program and the efforts of coalitions like Rice County's, which are working to create a culture of traffic safety in our communities.

"We need everyone's help to keep our roads safe," said Rice County Sheriff Jesse Thomas. "Staying safe on the road is simple: drive the speed limit, never drive impaired, buckle your seat belt and always pay attention."

Contact:

Kathy Cooper, Rice County Safe Roads Coalition Coordinator
kathycooper0215@gmail.com
507-319-3245

Suzy Rook, Communications Coordinator
suzy.rook@ricecountymn.gov
507-384-6509

