

Saint Patrick's Day is an exciting celebration for people of all ages in almost every area of the United States. Unfortunately, some people tend to over indulge in the green blarney or other spirits. As you know alcohol and driving never mix. Law enforcement officers from around the state are always looking for signs of intoxicated drivers; but are especially mindful near holidays or celebrations involving alcohol.

The Weld County Sheriff's Office is joining forces with other state and local highway safety and law enforcement officials across the nation to remind all of those who plan on using alcohol during St. Patrick's Day festivities this year to act responsibly by designating their sober drivers before the parties begin. If you are planning on celebrating this weekend have fun and enjoy yourself but you should also have a plan to get home safely. Never drive while impaired, and never let your friends drive if you think they are impaired. Designating a sober driver and not letting friends drive while impaired are just two of several simple steps to help avoid a tragic crash or an arrest for impaired driving. Other important tips include:

- If you're impaired, call a taxi, or a sober friend or family member to get you home safely;
- When you designate a sober driver give them your keys if you plan on drinking;
- Ask a bartender or host to call for or arrange a ride home;
- Report impaired drivers to law enforcement;
- Always buckle up, it's still your best defense against an impaired driver.

A June 27, 1999, table of costs associated with a DUI in Colorado was printed in the Denver Post. This table outlines most of the costs associated with a DUI. The total costs were \$8866.00. If you factor in an average annual inflation rate of 5% a DUI today will cost you nearly \$13,100. (Source <http://www.colorado-dui.com/parts/Cost.html>)

Impaired driving is one of America's deadliest problems. Overall in 2004, over 15,000 people died in highway crashes involving a driver or motorcycle operator with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .01 or higher. Of those, nearly 13,000 were in crashes where the BAC was .08 or higher. Also in 2004, 48 percent of all traffic fatalities that occurred during the evening of St. Patrick's Day to the early hours of the following morning involved drivers with BAC's of .01 and higher. Of those fatalities, a vast majority were crashes where the driver's BAC was .08 or higher – the illegal limit in all states, including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. This year, the risk may be even higher since St. Patrick's Day will be celebrated on a weekend.

According to Ken Poncelow, commander of the Weld County Sheriff's Office traffic unit, between 30 – 35% of all accidents which occur each year in Colorado and Weld County are a result of alcohol impairment.

Enjoy the holiday responsibly with family and friends and keep the luck of the Irish on your side.

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