



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

## NAVAL SAFETY CENTER PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

375 A STREET  
NORFOLK, VA 23511  
TEL: (757) 444-3520  
FAX: (757) 444-6791

[WWW.SAFETYCENTER.NAVY.MIL](http://WWW.SAFETYCENTER.NAVY.MIL)

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER – EXT. 7312  
MEDIA OFFICER – EXT. 7314  
SENIOR WRITER-EDITOR – EXT. 7243  
COMMUNICATIONS & MARKETING DEPARTMENT – EXT. 7610

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Drunk Driving, Specifically in Virginia, Can Be Costly**

By Dan Steber, Naval Safety Center Traffic Safety

The Naval Safety Center is partnering with local, state and nationwide agencies to help prevent private-motor-vehicle mishaps and deaths. At a recent meeting of Southeast Virginia's Impaired Driver Prevention Committee in Virginia Beach, this group discussed several joint projects and changes in state law that are of interest to local Sailors and anyone planning a trip to Virginia.

The Naval Safety Center and other Navy organizations have been working diligently to find ways to reduce DUI incidents and alcohol-related deaths from traffic wrecks. DUI enforcement is key. Virginia Beach Master Police Officer Brian Woltemath surprised the group when he pointed out that a mandatory jail sentence for a first-time offender is now part of state law.

“Drivers who are driving impaired can go to jail,” Woltemath said. “A person with a .15 to .19 BAC will receive a mandatory sentence of five days in jail. A .20 or higher BAC will land them in jail for 10 days.” He stressed the “mandatory” part of the law. The judge must sentence the first-time offender to jail.

This fact was not well known to many of the members in attendance and a follow-up survey of Hampton Roads Sailors and Marines showed that few knew about the change or the possibility of jail time for a first offense. PN3 Shahidul Islam, mail yeoman at the Naval Safety Center, said, “I didn't know about this law, and I'm sure others don't, either. I don't drink, but I have friends who do. They should be aware of this potential problem.”

Naval Safety Center stats show that 20 of 73 Navy deaths in FY04 were alcohol-related. A study of BAC rates showed that 19 of 28 people involved in alcohol-related mishaps (includes drivers or passengers not killed) had levels between .10 and .20. Two of those Navy personnel had levels above .20. A recent report on Navywide DUI/DWI incidents shows an increase to the highest level in five years (from 907 in FY00 to 1833 in FY04—a 100 percent increase). These trends are a concern and are being addressed, but every supervisor should be aware of these numbers. It will take involved leaders to help curb this growing problem.

The Director of Shore Safety Programs at the Naval Safety Center, Capt. Bill Glenn, said, “We want every Sailor and Marine in the Hampton Roads area to know about this change. We also want people around the fleet who visit Virginia to know about this change. The easiest way to avoid a DUI is not to drink at all, to follow the designated-driver program, or to use Safe-Ride or Topsy-Taxi program.”

Other alternatives exist, as well. Some bars and restaurants in parts of the country offer free taxi rides. The designated-driver program is another good option, but the non-drinker must not drink



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for it to be effective. It pays to have a well-developed plan before going out on the town. Sailors can have a good time, be safe, and return home alive, but they must take the appropriate actions ahead of time to ensure that success. An Air Force base has a program called “0-0-1-3,” which provides a clear set of standards for drivers to remember: zero underage drinking, zero DUIs, one drink an hour, and a maximum of three drinks a night.

The Director of Programs for the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police, Frank Kowaleski, is a supporter of Virginia’s “Checkpoint Strikeforce,” and he added, “There’s a [DUI] checkpoint happening every week and everywhere in Virginia.” His group is working with the Impaired Driver Prevention Committee to design and distribute cards that can be handed out at sobriety checkpoints that thank responsible drivers for putting up with the stop and for being sober. It also will remind drivers that the slight inconvenience is better than the cost of a DUI (\$5,000 to \$20,000), the time (jail, even for first-time offenders), and a life (which is priceless).

“It’s imperative that supervisors pass this information to their people because other communities around the country have similar laws,” said Bonnie Revell, traffic-safety specialist at the Naval Safety Center. “Jail time is one heck of a punishment for a night out on the town. It takes just a little planning for a Sailor or Marine to have a good time and to get home safely, avoiding an accident, death or a trip to a courthouse and jail.”

The impaired-driver working group includes representatives from Drive Safe Hampton Roads, Hoffman Beverage, Virginia Beach Police Department, Virginia Checkpoint Strikeforce, AAA Virginia, Virginia DMV, Chesapeake Bay ASAP, and Naval Safety Center. They meet bi-monthly to discuss issues that affect the community and the military.

For more information on strategies to reduce impaired driving, visit the Safe Drive Hampton Roads website at [www.drivesafehr.org/dshr/index.shtml](http://www.drivesafehr.org/dshr/index.shtml); Naval Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Program at <http://navdweb.spawar.navy.mil/>; National Commission Against Drunk Driving (NCADD) website at [www.ncadd.com](http://www.ncadd.com); and National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) website at [www.nhtsa.dot.gov](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov). Links and additional information can be found on the Naval Safety Center website at [safetycenter.navy.mil/ashore/motorvehicle](http://safetycenter.navy.mil/ashore/motorvehicle).

**About the Naval Safety Center:** Established in 1951, the Naval Safety Center is the Navy’s leading organization that conducts safety investigations, analyzes mishaps, and provides safety information to the Fleet. The Center serves communities in aviation, afloat, shore and recreation/traffic, ground operations, and occupational safety and health. Commander, Naval Safety Center reports directly to the Chief of Naval Operations, provides assistance to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Safety, and supports over 4,200 Marine and Navy commands worldwide to promote safety and safety processes and to preserve the lives of our service members. Our web site is at [safetycenter.navy.mil/](http://safetycenter.navy.mil/). Also visit our Navy NewsStand page at <http://www.news.navy.mil/local/nsc>.



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**About the 50%-Mishap-Reduction Campaign:** On May 19, 2003, the Secretary of Defense challenged DoD to achieve a 50-percent, across-the-board mishap reduction by the end of FY05. In fiscal year 2004, mishaps killed 113 Sailors, and cost the Navy \$524 million in equipment damage and lost resources. Of the mishap cost, \$468 million was in aviation mishaps. Seventy-three of the deaths were on the highway. The mishap-reduction challenge aims at 10 targets. Four involve Class A mishaps (which cause \$1 million or more in damage, destroy an aircraft, kill someone, or leave someone totally disabled): total operational, aviation (which alone accounts for 94 percent of the costs), afloat and ashore. Four other targets involve fatalities: traffic (which accounts for more than half the total deaths), off-duty, afloat and aviation. The other two are the number of destroyed aircraft and civilian lost-time injuries.