

## DUI increase in Pa. is alarming



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Pennsylvania State Police arrested a record 15,583 people for driving under the influence last year, an increase of 3 percent over 2006.

One could draw two conclusions from the statistics: troopers have gotten a lot more aggressive in enforcement or there are a lot more people driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Or, perhaps a little of both is the case.

We certainly know that state and municipal police officers are more observant when it comes to impaired drivers. Col. Jeffrey Miller, state police commissioner, said troopers "are using education, training and continued high levels of enforcement" to get them off the roads. Specially funded law-enforcement efforts such as the Luzerne County Sobriety Checkpoint Program and the North Central Highway Safety Network in Schuylkill County are aimed at preventing drunk drivers from causing a serious accident, while agencies like Serento Gardens help people overcome addictions to alcohol or drugs.

Still, 525 people were killed in alcohol-related accidents in Pennsylvania last year, the state Department of Transportation reported. While that is fewer than the 544 killed in 2006, the 4,775 alcohol-related accidents that state police investigated last year were 39 more than in 2007.

It's not only alcohol that's killing people on the roads anymore, though; illegal and prescription drugs also can impair drivers. The state police have responded by expanding its drug recognition expert program; since 2004, it has trained 36 troopers and local police officers to identify those driving under the influence of drugs.

In 2003, Pennsylvania decreased the blood-alcohol level at which one is considered too intoxicated to drive from .10 percent to .08 percent. That means it probably takes one drink less for a person to be too intoxicated to drive.

Miller noted that the numerous anti-DUI efforts by law enforcement won't do any good if people continue to make "a foolish, dangerous decision" to drink and then drive. "It is the responsibility of each and every driver ... to stay out of the driver's seat when he or she is impaired by alcohol or other drugs," he said.

It's a responsibility that should be taken seriously; so, if you're driving, don't consume even one drink. It's a simple sacrifice that could prevent a lot of trouble.

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