



News Release No. 36

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FOURTH TROOPER IN THREE MONTHS STRUCK & INJURED BY PASSING MOTORIST ON VIRGINIA INTERSTATE

ROCKBRIDGE CO., Va. – For the fourth time in three consecutive months, a Virginia State Police trooper has been rushed to a hospital after being struck and injured by a passing motorist. Trooper P.C. Gardner, assigned to the Virginia State Police Salem Division, is currently recuperating from injuries sustained in a crash this morning (June 16) on Interstate 81 in Rockbridge County.

At approximately 6:47 a.m., Trooper Gardner was seated in his vehicle finishing up a traffic stop. With emergency lights activated, his silver Chevrolet Impala was parked in the right shoulder of the southbound lanes of I-81 at the 201.7 mile marker. The violator had just pulled away and was merging into traffic when Trooper Gardner heard the sound of tires on the shoulder's rumble strips. When he looked into the rearview mirror, he saw a tractor-trailer heading towards his patrol vehicle. With only seconds to spare, the trooper jumped across his front seat to the passenger side of his car as it was hit by the tractor-trailer.

The driver of the tractor-trailer then lost control and the tractor-trailer went through the guardrail and down an embankment off the right side of the Interstate. The tractor-trailer jackknifed and came to rest against the embankment. The driver, Mikel B. Elliott, 57, of Blacksburg, Va., has been charged with one count of reckless driving. Elliott was not injured in the crash.

Trooper Gardner was transported by ambulance to Stonewall Jackson Hospital in Lexington, Va. His injuries are not considered life-threatening.

"While we realize there are risks associated with being in law enforcement, what's happening on the side of Virginia interstates to our troopers is completely unacceptable," said Colonel W. Steven Flaherty, Virginia State Police Superintendent. "Every one of the incidents that have occurred this year statewide could have been prevented had the drivers simply complied with our state's 'Move Over' law or not been drinking and driving."

Virginia's "Slow Down, Move Over" law requires drivers to change to another travel lane or to slow down and cautiously pass emergency personnel stopped on the side of the road. Violation of the law carries a punishment of up to \$2,500 fine and/or 12 months in jail. For more information regarding the Move Over law, brochures and public service announcements, visit the Virginia State Police Website at <http://www.vsp.virginia.gov>.

Monday's incident occurred only 39 miles north of last month's close call for Master Trooper J.H. Rasnick. On May 13, 2008, Master Trooper Rasnick was seated in his patrol vehicle on the side of I-81 at the 162 mile marker in Botetourt Co. when it was sideswiped by a tractor-trailer. State police are still searching for the suspect tractor-trailer. It was at the 38 mile marker on I-81 in Smyth Co. on Feb. 2, 2008, that Trooper K.S. Chapman was struck by a drunk driver and severely injured. Trooper Chapman was also seated in his vehicle when injured.

On May 7, 2008, Trooper K.J. Brown was seated in his vehicle on Interstate 66 in Northern Virginia when it was struck by a passing motorist. For Trooper J.T. Mahalik, it was a drunk driver who ran off the road and struck his patrol vehicle on I-66 on April 30, 2008. Trooper Mahalik and the violator were both seated inside the vehicle when it was struck from behind. The crash caused Trooper Mahalik's car to catch fire. Despite his injuries, Trooper Mahalik was able to rescue the violator and himself from the burning car.



STATEWIDE MEDIA CONTACTS:

VSP HQ	Richmond	Culpeper	Appomattox	Wytheville	Chesapeake	Salem/Roanoke	Fairfax
Ms. C.Geller	Sgt. Cunningham	Sgt. Tyler	Sgt. Cooper	Sgt. Conroy	Sgt. Cotten	Sgt. Carpentieri	Ms. C. Geller
(804) 674-2789	(804)553-3494	(540)829-7713	(434)352-3403	(276)223-4242	(757)424-6827	(540)375-9598	(804)674-2789