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TRAFFIC FATALITIES DROP DURING THE 2008 THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

Trooper Arrests Murder Suspect After Single Vehicle Traffic Crash

RICHMOND – Traffic fatalities declined significantly over the 2008 Thanksgiving holiday weekend compared to this time last year. Preliminary numbers indicate nine people died in nine traffic crashes during the five-day statistical counting period which is Virginia’s lowest Thanksgiving fatality count since 2002, when nine individuals were also killed in traffic crashes. In 2007, 19 people were killed in 18 crashes on Virginia roads and traffic collisions claimed 16 lives in 2006.

Among those who died, during the extended holiday, were two teenagers, two bicyclists and one pedestrian. Alcohol was a factor in two of the crashes. Additionally, seat belt restraints were not used in two crashes. The fatal collisions took place in the counties of Carroll, Fairfax, Louisa, Powhatan, Prince William, Rockbridge, Rockingham and Southampton.

“Overall, the recent decline in fatal traffic crashes is encouraging. However, it should not be a reason to become complacent for drivers and passengers,” said Colonel W. Steven Flaherty, Virginia State Police Superintendent. “Safety on the roads should still be a priority for all motorists as evident by the fact our troopers worked more than one thousand crashes statewide during the Thanksgiving holiday.”

On Sunday, during the increased holiday enforcement, Virginia State Police Sr. Trooper R.D. Horton was dispatched to a single vehicle accident on Route 620 in Carroll County, near the North Carolina line. During the crash investigation, 27 year-old John Michael Mason was charged with DUI, resisting arrest and possession of a firearm by a convicted felon. It was also discovered Mason was wanted for first-degree murder by the Staunton Police Department. The Virginia State Police is assisting Staunton police with the murder investigation.

As part of the Virginia State Police holiday enforcement safety strategy, troopers participated in the Combined Accident Reduction Effort, or *Operation C.A.R.E.* The state-sponsored, national program is designed to decrease crashes, fatalities and injuries caused by speeding, impaired driving and the failure to use occupant restraints. The traffic safety program is conducted during the year’s national holidays.

The 2008 *Operation C.A.R.E.* program yielded the following summonses and/or arrests by Virginia State Police statewide: 9,921 for speeding; 2,810 for reckless driving; 188 for driving under the influence; 916 for not wearing safety belts, 220 for not using child restraints; and 6,054 for other hazardous violations.

The 2008 Thanksgiving statistical counting period began Wednesday, Nov. 26, and ended at midnight Sunday, Nov. 30, 2008. Seventy-five percent of the Virginia State Police work force worked this Thanksgiving weekend as part of *Operation C.A.R.E.*

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