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THIRTEEN PEOPLE KILLED ON VIRGINIA HIGHWAYS DURING THE 2009 THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

RICHMOND – While traffic fatalities overall are on the decline compared to this time last year, the number of fatal crashes remained high for the 2009 Thanksgiving holiday. Preliminary totals indicate 13 individuals were killed in 13 crashes during the five-day statistical counting period. Traffic crashes during the 2008 Thanksgiving holiday period claimed 12 lives.

Prior to the extended holiday weekend, Virginia State Police participated in a *Click It or Ticket* enforcement wave (Nov. 15-22, 2009). Despite the earlier safety initiative, four of the 13 individuals killed during the 2009 Thanksgiving holiday were not wearing a safety belt. Also, state police cited 886 safety belt violations and 239 child restraint violations across the Commonwealth. Of the 12 people killed in traffic crashes in Virginia during the 2008 Thanksgiving holiday, nine people failed to buckle up.

“The loss of life during this holiday weekend is unfortunate and needless when it only takes a few seconds to secure a safety belt,” says Colonel W. Steven Flaherty, Virginia State Police Superintendent. “Whether you are a driver or a passenger, buckling up should be one of the first actions you take as you get into a vehicle.”

Among those who died, three of the victims were pedestrians and one was a motorcyclist. Alcohol was a factor in at least four of the crashes.

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 2009 *Operation C.A.R.E.* program yielded the following summonses and/or arrests by Virginia State Police statewide: 10,459 for speeding; 2,657 for reckless driving; 132 for driving under the influence and 6,695 for other hazardous violations.

The 2009 Thanksgiving statistical counting period began Wednesday, Nov. 25, and ended at midnight Sunday, Nov. 29, 2009. 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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