STATE LAW ENFORCEMENT URGES SAFETY DURING SPRING BREAK

~ ‘Spring Broke’ is a party students can’t afford ~

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. – State law enforcement agencies and associations today joined forces to encourage spring breakers to have a safe celebration in Florida. The state’s beautiful beaches and numerous tourist attractions lure thousands of spring breakers every year, but bad decisions about drugs and alcohol can ruin the party and change lives forever. Throughout the month of March, law enforcement agencies will be out enforcing the state’s drinking age laws and working to keep impaired drivers off the roads.

The Florida Highway Patrol cautions visitors and residents in the Sunshine State to think twice before Driving Under the Influence of alcohol or drugs. Driving impaired not only puts everyone on the roadways in danger, but drivers should also know that Florida’s tough DUI laws have stiff penalties that can leave offenders with an empty wallet.

“Throughout the spring break period, we will continue our enhanced enforcement efforts with special emphasis on impaired drivers,” said FHP Director Col. David Brierton. “Florida troopers do not tolerate impaired driving, so drive sober and drive safely.”

The Department of Business and Professional Regulation’s Division of Alcoholic Beverages is responsible for enforcing the state’s beverage laws, including the state’s drinking age. The Division works closely with local law enforcement officials during the spring break season to identify underage drinking or sales of alcohol to minors.

“Florida is a wonderful place to visit, but we want to make sure our visitors have a safe experience and that means we’ll be actively looking for underage drinking,” said DBPR’s Secretary Ken Lawson. “Underage drinking is dangerous, and whether you’re underage in possession of alcohol or selling alcohol to an underage person, the consequences will be serious.”

Knowing the following information and tips can help you and everyone with whom you celebrate enjoy your spring break safely:

- The legal drinking age in Florida is 21. Anyone under the age of 21 in possession of alcohol can be cited for a second-degree misdemeanor, which can lead to costly court fees, fines and other lasting consequences.

- Selling alcohol to anyone under 21 or buying alcohol for anyone under 21 is also a misdemeanor.

- Possession of an open alcoholic beverage container in a vehicle (in motion or stopped) by the driver and or the passenger(s) is a violation of Florida law.

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- Plan ahead. Always designate a sober driver before any drinking begins, or take a taxi or public transportation if you plan to drink alcohol. A taxi or bus ride is much cheaper than a DUI citation.

- Take the keys. Do not let an impaired friend drive.

- Mind your meds. Heed the warning labels on prescription medicine bottles because even legal drugs can affect your ability to operate a motor vehicle safely.

- Dial *FHP (*347) on your cell phone to report an impaired driver.

Drivers under the age of 21 should keep in mind that if they are caught with a Blood Alcohol Content level of .02 or higher, their license will be suspended for six months. A second offense results in a one-year suspension. The first offense for refusing to submit to testing results in a 12-month suspension, and a second offense results in an 18-month suspension.

The Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles has created a poster to remind spring breakers of the cost of a DUI. The poster is available online for download at http://www.flhsmv.gov/html/SpringBreak2013.pdf.

What Florida’s law enforcement leaders are saying about spring break:

“We are committed to making sure that everyone has a safe spring break. We will focus on the typical violations encountered during this time and work diligently to keep students safe.”
~ Sheriff Sadie Darnell, Alachua County

“The Broward Sheriff’s Office is dedicated to keeping impaired drivers off the streets. Drinking and driving do not mix. If you are under the influence of drugs and alcohol, make the decision not to drive. Take a cab. Call a friend for a ride. Don’t endanger other drivers, your friends or yourself.”
~ Sheriff Scott Israel, Broward County

“Sexual assaults are a danger of spring break festivities, and predators come in all shapes and sizes. Be safe and alert, and avoid excessive use of alcohol.”
~ Chief Michael Chitwood, Daytona Beach Police Department

“Highlands County deputies will continue our alcohol compliance checks. Checking in on vendors who sell alcohol to be sure that proper identification is requested before the sale occurs is an ongoing proactive prevention initiative in our county to help combat underage drinking.”
~ Sheriff Susan Benton, Highlands County

Benton also serves as the president of the Florida Sheriffs Association and added this statement on behalf of FSA, “When the sheriffs of Florida combine resources, our capabilities are unmatched. Each sheriff has something to bring to the operation; making for success, saving lives, and reducing potential for violence.”
“Misuse or abuse can quickly turn vacation into probation or worse. We encourage our locals and visitors to enjoy their time off, but we want them back next year safe and sound without a criminal record on their résumé.”
~ Sheriff Mike Scott, Lee County

“The Miami Beach Police Department encourages spring breakers, as well as all of our city’s visitors, to enjoy their time on Miami Beach – but do so safely. The police department will be enhancing its efforts during the spring break period with the emphasis on enforcing underage drinking and impaired driving. We want visitors to have fun, be safe and responsible while respecting the law while they are enjoying all of what Miami Beach has to offer.
~ Chief Raymond Martinez, Miami Beach Police Department

“These young men and women come to South Florida to enjoy themselves, and they can do this in so many different ways. We at the Miami-Dade Police Department have zero tolerance for underage drinking. Our goal is to educate these young adults to avoid destructive decisions that may lead to tragedies.”
~ Director J.D. Patterson, Miami-Dade Police Department

“Spring break brings many of our young people around three very dangerous things, the highway, the water and in some cases alcohol. We ask that everyone, including these young people, be responsible, have a good time, but most of all, be around to come back again.”
~ Sheriff Paul May, Okeechobee County

“Impaired drivers pose a great danger to the citizens of Orange County. We encourage our over one million citizens and 55 million guests who visit our area to refrain from drinking and driving. Our deputies will be out in force to arrest those who could potentially injure or kill themselves or others because they made a poor decision.”
~ Sheriff Jerry L. Demings, Orange County

“The city of Panama City Beach and I welcome the spring breakers, and we wish to remind them to use common sense and to adhere to the laws in the state of Florida because they will be enforced. We want them to have fun and to return home safe to their families and campuses.”
~ Chief Drew R. Whitman, Panama City Beach Police Department

“The leading cause of death among those ages 15 to 20 is motor vehicle fatalities, often fueled by underage drinking. Sadly, this peaks during spring break. I am committed to preventing underage drinking and driving and its tragic consequences.”
~ Sheriff Ken J. Mascara, St. Lucie County

“The Florida Police Chiefs Association and its members encourage the young people coming into our state to enjoy their time here but to do so safely by not drinking and driving or engaging in other illegal activities that put their life at risk. We want to maintain a safe environment that allows the kids coming to our state to go back home when the festivities are over, taking their memories with them.”
~ Chief Dennis Jones, Tallahassee Police Department and FPCA President

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