

End the streak

- By Jessica Pounds/features@trcle.com

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Johnson County Chief Forensic Death Investigator Gary Morris takes photos of the scene of a fatal wreck. According to the Texas Department of Transportation, at least one person has died on Texas roadways every single day since Nov. 7, 2000.
Jessica Pounds/CTR

Not all anniversaries are happy ones.

Since Nov. 7, 2000, at least one person has died on Texas roadways every single day.

In an effort to end this deadly milestone, the Texas Department of Transportation recently launched the #EndTheStreakTX campaign, reminding drivers it's a shared responsibility among roadway users and engineers to keep our roads safe.

"It's heartbreaking to know that every day for the past 18 years someone has lost a spouse, child, friend or neighbor on our state's roadways," TxDOT Executive Director James Bass said. "Ending this deadly daily streak is a shared responsibility."

“We will continue to engineer our roads to be more forgiving of drivers’ errors, but we all must work toward ending such preventable contributing factors as distracted driving, speeding and drunk driving. Let’s make it a priority to be safe, focused and responsible behind the wheel. Let’s end the streak.”

Law enforcement agencies in Johnson County are encouraging drivers to buckle seatbelts, pay attention, drive the speed limit and never drink and drive.

Cleburne Police Chief Rob Severance said he is passionate about traffic safety.

“I was a traffic accident investigator — collision reconstruction — for the Grand Prairie Police Department from 1996 to 2002,” he said. “I was also a drug recognition evaluator specially trained to recognize impairment in drivers under the influence of drugs other than, or in addition to, alcohol.

“During that time I investigated a number of traffic fatalities. I recall having to break the horrible news to several families after one crash claimed the lives of a car full of teenagers. That crash, like so many others, could have been prevented if the driver had just slowed down. Speed kills.”

Burleson Police Chief Billy Cordell said the focus needs to be on preventing crashes.

“Distracted driving and driving while under the influence are things we have total control over,” he said. “My focus is on DWI because I have had three people I know killed by drunk drivers.”

He said the first was a fellow K9 officer and close friend.

“He was off duty driving down a freeway when the drunk driver clipped his car as he passed,” Cordell said. “It caused my friend’s car to roll over and he was killed.”

While working in Fort Worth, two officers Cordell knew were killed by drunk drivers while on duty.

“It is tough burying people you know when this is a senseless offense,” he said. “There are many options in this day and time to get you home safely so that you are not a danger to yourself or others. If you go out, have a plan so you are not driving impaired. Have a designated driver, take a cab or call a friend, but don’t risk killing someone or going to jail because you did not plan the evening.”

Keene Police Chief Emmitt Jackson said avoiding distractions while driving is essential to operating a motor vehicle safely.

“According to a recent report by the National Highway and Transportation Administration, texting while driving creates the same level of impairment as drinking four beers,” he said. “Every vehicle made today already has enough distractions that take your eyes off the road — from the radio, to GPS systems, to touch screens, to warning lights on the dash board. Adding a cellphone or other hand-held device to the mix is potentially lethal.”

Severance said motor vehicle crashes are not accidents, they are predictable and be prevented.

He also said:

- Traffic issues are just as important to the community as criminal issues.
- Traffic law enforcement is an important element of community policing.
- Proactive enforcement of traffic violations results in numerous criminal apprehensions.
- Traffic stops can prevent crash-related personal tragedies.
- Criminal acts and traffic crashes both result in personal tragedy. Nevertheless, the fact remains, traffic crashes affect Americans each year more frequently than criminal acts.

- The deterrence system of traffic laws, enforcement and sanction is seriously weakened when enforcement is minimal and punishment is uncertain.
- Research tells us that lack of enforcement may send a signal to residents that police are absent or uncaring, leading not only to a disregard of the traffic safety rules and to higher accident rates but also to higher rates of crime in the community.

At least one a day has died on Texas roadways since 2000