

Holiday safety tip: Safety starts before the first drink

By Master Sgt. Paul Ahlberg
437 MDG

There are many opportunities for alcohol-impaired persons to cause injury and death to themselves and to others. Driving a car, flying an airplane, using heavy machinery or industrial equipment, and participating in winter recreational activities, such as sledding and skiing, become dangerous when you choose to become impaired by alcohol use. Over this past year, twelve Team Charleston members have chosen to take the risk to become impaired by alcohol and drive.

According to a study by the Transport and Road Research Laboratory, one-tenth of all motor vehicle accidents with serious injury result from driving with excess alcohol in the blood. One-third of drivers and motorcycle riders killed have alcohol levels above the Uniform Code of Military Justice limit (.10). On Friday and Saturday nights, between 10 p.m. and 4 a.m., two-thirds of drivers and riders killed in car crashes have alcohol levels above the legal limit. Also, alcohol-related traffic accidents are the leading cause of death among people under the age of 24. Finally, alcohol misuse was involved in half of the suicide attempts this calendar year at Charleston AFB.

Staff Sgt. John West, Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention and Treatment Program NCOIC said, "Drinking and driving carries many other consequences as well. The worst being the life sentenced to guilt, pain and suffering the offender causes the victim, their family, themselves and their own family.

Here in South Carolina, DUI jail times range from a few hours for a simple DUI to 25 years for a DUI with death to another, fines from \$200 to \$25,000, loss of work, drivers license suspension and increased insurance cost to name just a few."

What happens to alcohol once in the body? After taking a drink, the liquid passes quickly from the mouth into the stomach. Then, without digestion, it moves into the small intestine where it is absorbed into the blood. From there, alcohol is transported to every organ in the body, metabolized and eliminated by the liver. It takes approximately one hour for your liver to process one drink.

One drink is considered one-half ounce of pure alcohol or what is in one 12-ounce beer, four-five ounces of wine or one ounce of hard liquor.

One trend we saw in those who misused alcohol over Memorial Day weekend was a basic lack of understanding of alcohol as a drug. Each person reported "not feeling intoxicated," yet they were. Their driving was impaired and they exceeded the legal limit of allowable alcohol in the blood stream to drive. Each active duty member and supervisor should carefully review the information provided below to protect yourself and others from needless tragedy.

Alcohol has many effects on the body, especially the areas of the brain that affect your ability to drive. Alcohol may give you a good feeling; actually it is a central nervous system depressant slowing down the processes in the brain. First of all, it decreases muscle coordination and slows

reaction time, blurs vision and finally impairs your ability to judge speed, distance and reaction to the unexpected.

Lt Col. (Dr.) Frank Budd, Behavioral Sciences Flight commander says, "Driving under the influence of alcohol is often a symptom of an alcohol problem. It often reflects poor judgment in overall use of alcohol, with a DUI only being a problem when caught."

Team Charleston is truly fortunate so far this year. Even though DUIs have increased from last year, we maintain one of the lowest incident rates in Air Mobility Command. The combined efforts of senior leadership, all commanders, supervisors, law enforcement, helping agencies and individual members and their families have enabled the base to reduce the number of DUIs.

The Air Force maintains driving under the influence is a serious breach of discipline. It affects the family, the health and well-being of the individual and others. It also degrades mission readiness.

Catherine Hallett, ADAPT program manager, says, "It is the responsibility of every Team Charleston member to encourage responsible alcohol use and help prevent DUIs."

Here are some guidelines that may be helpful to our cause of eliminating DUI incidents on and off-base.

Some ways to combat drinking and driving

1. Ideally, if you're planning to drive, do not drink; even small quantities of alcohol can impair performance

2. Plan ahead, before drinking

starts; where are you going, how are you getting there, how are you returning and how much are you going to drink

3. Use the wingman system; go out with a friend who is not drinking or a group with a non-drinking designated driver

4. Have your squadron's designated driver program card and numbers available; use a cab or call your supervisor for a safe ride

5. Do not drink on an empty stomach

6. Eat while you are drinking

7. Drink slowly and limit the amount you drink to not more than two-three drinks; remember it takes one hour for your body to process one drink; most DUI drinkers have more than five drinks; time is the only thing that will sober you up

8. Be a responsible party host and ensure your guests have a safe way home; take keys, call a cab for them, take them home if you have not been drinking or let them spend the night

9. Serve a variety of non-alcoholic beverages in addition to food at your parties; have an enjoyable activity for your guests to prevent excessive use of alcohol

10. Always use good common sense when you use alcohol; always use it responsibly and remember it is a drug and will impair you eventually; if you know someone who is drinking and driving, set them straight - you may save a life

For more information about alcohol facts, drinking and driving and services for those with alcohol problems, call the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention and Treatment Program staff at 963-6852.