

DON'T

Drug driving...you'd be off your head

3 March 2008

DRUG DRIVERS IN NORTH EAST TARGETED

A major new initiative to target people who drive under the influence of drugs is being launched this week across the North East.

The campaign, which is funded by the Local Authority Road Safety Officers Association (LARSOA) for the North East*, The North East Drug Action Teams, County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service and Government Office North East and supported by the three police forces, aims to raise awareness of the dangers of drug-driving and the penalties for anyone caught driving under the influence.

Washroom posters and beer mats are being placed in 600 pubs, clubs colleges and universities targeting young people with the message "Drug driving...you'd be off your head".

A heavyweight five-week radio campaign on Galaxy 105-106, Metro Radio and TFM, using a genuine case study from a remorseful drug driver and the website www.drugdriving.com, also aim to get the message across.

Paul Watson, LARSOA Chair in the North-East and Hartlepool Council's Road Safety Manager, says: "Drug driving doesn't just have an impact on the organisations involved in road safety, health and enforcement – it also has a huge effect on the local communities whose safety is compromised every time motorists drive under the influence of drugs."

Initial research amongst young people, the main target for this initiative, showed a lack of understanding about the dangers of drug-driving and the consequences for motorists who risk driving after taking drugs. Perception of likely penalties, included 'a caution' and 'a £50 fine and slap on the wrist'.

Paul Watson adds: "While we are making great strides in positioning drug driving in the same light as drink driving in the North East, we cannot become complacent and we will continue to campaign against this until it becomes clear that it is no longer an issue."

Inspector Eric Robinson, Head of Cleveland's Road Policing Unit and Chair of Cleveland Casualty Reduction Group, says: "Cleveland Police takes this illegal driving behaviour extremely seriously. Young drivers are particularly vulnerable to the risk of driving while under the influence of drugs. Our aim is to tackle this problem pro-actively and we have more than 190 trained officers able to undertake roadside drug impairment testing."

Steve Laverick, Casualty Reduction Coordinator of County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service, says: "Driving whilst under the influence of drugs is just as dangerous as driving when drunk. Unfortunately, there doesn't seem to be the same stigma associated with drug driving as there is with drink driving, but it's crucial that people realise just how dangerous it is.

"Not only could drivers lose their licence but they risk causing an accident, injuring themselves or someone else."

Chief Inspector Tim Wilson, Deputy Head of Operational Support at Durham Police, says: "Drug-driving is as unacceptable as drink-driving and our message to anybody taking drugs and getting behind the wheel is that when you are caught - you will lose your licence, you could receive a prison sentence and you may be fined up to £5,000.

"This is an issue, together with drinking and driving, that we look out for all year long as well as during specific campaigns."

Sharon Baines, spokesperson for the North East Drug Action Teams adds:
"Drugs affect the way you think and behave and can have a significant effect on your sense of judgement and reaction times. We need people to take this issue seriously, and this campaign is raising awareness of the dangers of drug driving across the North East."

"We all know that drink and driving don't mix - we now need to get across the same message about drugs."

According to the Department for Transport, drugs can affect drivers by causing slower reaction times, poor concentration, sleepiness, confusion, distorted perception, over-confidence, impaired co-ordination, hallucinations, blurred vision, aggression and dizziness.

Treatment, counselling and support is available to users of drugs. People who would like more information and advice as well as details of where they can get treatment, can contact FRANK, the national helpline, on 0800 77 66 00 or visit www.talktofrank.com.

ENDS

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Notes to Editors:

*** The Local Authority Road Safety Officers Association (LARSOA) for the North East*** comprises of 12 local authorities - Darlington Borough Council, Durham County Council, Gateshead Council, Hartlepool Borough Council, Middlesbrough Council, Newcastle City Council, North Tyneside Council, Northumberland County Council, Redcar & Cleveland Council, South Tyneside MBC, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and Sunderland City Council.

How drugs can affect driving

Cannabis: Concentration can wander, affecting reaction times; paranoia and effects likely to be heightened when mixed with alcohol increasing sense of disorientation.

Cocaine: Stimulant drug that can lead to misjudging driving speed and stopping distance. Sense of light and sound affected; sense of overconfidence which can also lead to aggressive driving.

Ecstasy: Another stimulant drug, this time with hallucinogenic properties which can distort vision and heighten sense of sound. Concentration is affected and significantly decreases awareness of road dangers.

LSD: Hallucinogenic drug that can strongly influence the senses; drivers may react to objects and sounds that aren't there, placing themselves and other road users in danger.