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Safe Driving: Something to be Thankful for this Holiday Season

SACRAMENTO—The California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) is joining with the California Highway Patrol and California State Transportation Agency to remind motorists to prepare for increased traffic and poor weather conditions during the holiday season.

“Thanksgiving is one of the most heavily traveled holidays, with millions of people hitting the roadways to celebrate and give thanks with loved ones,” said Russia Chavis, Acting Director of OTS. “Help yourself and others stay safe on the road this holiday season: Buckle up, stay off your cell phone and don’t drink and drive.”

Local law enforcement and the California Highway Patrol will be out in force into and throughout the long Thanksgiving weekend, focusing on seat belt usage, handheld cell phone texting and talking, and especially alcohol and drug impaired driving. California will also join several other states highway patrol agencies across the nation to participate in two traffic safety challenges during the Thanksgiving holiday weekend.

“A majority of collisions and roadway deaths are preventable if motorists follow basic traffic safety rules,” said California Highway Patrol Commissioner Joe Farrow.

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation’s National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 249 occupants were killed in motor vehicle traffic crashes nationwide during the 2011 Thanksgiving holiday weekend.

The following driving tips will help to prepare motorists for the unpredictable conditions often brought on by fall weather and holiday driving.

Safety First and Always

- Buckle up. Every trip. Every time. *Click It or Ticket!*
- Don’t text or talk on your cell phone while driving – even when it is hands-free. *It’s Not Worth it!*
- Always carry a roadside safety kit. Buy one or make your own with help from <http://www.ots.ca.gov/roadsideemergencykit.asp>

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- On long trips, take turns driving to avoid fatigue. Plan for frequent stops to stretch your legs and refocus
- Designate a sober driver *before* you head out for the night. *Report Drunk Drivers – Call 911*
- Get an early start and permit plenty of time to reach your destination.

Driving in Rain

- Before the rainy season begins, make sure to replace your car's old or damaged wiper blades.
- Remain alert and constantly scan the road in front of you for brake lights. Avoid using your brakes when possible and, instead, take your foot off the accelerator to slow down.
- Always maintain a safe, proper following distance; stay toward the middle lanes, since water tends to pool in outside lanes.
- When you need to stop or slow down in wet conditions, do not brake hard or lock the wheels. Instead, maintain steady pressure on the brake pedal.
- If you find yourself hydroplaning or skidding, remember the following:
 - Ease your foot off the gas until the vehicle slows and you can feel traction on the road again. Do not brake or turn suddenly.
 - Turn your steering wheel in the direction of the skid. As you recover control, gently straighten the wheels.
 - If your vehicle has anti-lock brakes, brake normally because the vehicle's computer will mimic a pumping action. If you don't have anti-lock brakes, brake gently with a light pumping action.

Driving in Snow Country

- Make sure your brakes, windshield wipers, defroster, heater, tires and exhaust system are in top condition.
- Always carry chains that are the proper size for your tires and in working order. Also, make sure you know how to install the chains on your vehicle.
- Pack water, food, warm blankets and extra clothing, as sometimes road closures make for lengthy traffic delays.
- Carry the Caltrans Road Conditions phone number in your car or save it into your cellphone for easy access to updated road conditions – (800) 427-7623.
- Exercise caution when driving in winter conditions and adjust your speed accordingly. A highway speed of 65 miles per hour may be safe in dry weather, but it is an invitation for trouble on snow and ice.

Following these tips can help create safer roads for those traveling this holiday season. Motorists should also take simple steps to prepare for roadside emergencies. The Governor's Office of Emergency Services has useful information to help Californians be better prepared, including how to maintain emergency kits for homes, businesses and vehicles. For more information visit:

<http://www.calema.ca.gov/NewsandMedia/Pages/Preparedness-Month.aspx>

For more tips on safe driving, visit the California Office of Traffic Safety at www.ots.ca.gov or the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration at www.nhtsa.gov.