Effort to prevent drunk driving in Indian Country runs from December 21, 2009, to January 3, 2010

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For Immediate Release: December 22, 2009
Print PDF

Washington, D.C. – Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs Larry Echo Hawk today announced that on December 21 the Bureau of Indian Affairs began its 2009 drunk-driving prevention campaign, "Don't Shatter the Dream," which is being conducted by BIA and tribal law enforcement in Indian Country through January 3, 2010.

"I can think of no better effort by Bureau of Indian Affairs and tribal law enforcement agencies to keep drunk drivers off Indian Country's roads than the 'Don't Shatter the Dream' mobilization effort," said Echo Hawk. "I want to thank our officers and tribal police departments for working hand-in-hand to keep everyone safe during this holiday season."

The "Don't Shatter the Dream" Indian State Impaired Driving Mobilization is a joint effort by the BIA's Office of Justice Services (OJS), the Indian Affairs Indian Highway Safety Program (IHSP) and the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to reduce injuries and save lives. The campaign seeks to send a message across Indian Country that driving while impaired will not be tolerated throughout the holiday season, and that tribal officers are on alert to protect drivers on reservation roadways.

This is the fifth year that the OJS has worked with tribal law enforcement personnel to set up enhanced enforcement, such as checkpoints and saturation patrols, on federal Indian lands in an effort to reduce motor vehicle crash injuries and fatalities, especially those attributed to drunk drivers.

A new tool being deployed this year is the BAT (Breath Alcohol Testing) mobile, four of which were delivered in November to three OJS law enforcement districts based in Billings, Mont., Albuquerque, N.M., and Muscogee, Okla., for use by tribal law enforcement. The districts serve 77 federally recognized tribes, with a combined population of 581,756, in seven states.

The 40-foot long mobile units, which cost approximately $300,000 apiece, use state-of-the art lighting, camera and communications systems. Each has an Intoxilyzer 8000 to precisely measure breath alcohol levels, a containment cell to transport suspects and an interior camera to produce court-quality videos of the testing process. Each unit also is decorated on the outside with colors and design elements that reflect American Indian culture, with police identification on the back and sides, and has space on the back for a user-tribe's seal. The units were manufactured by Farber Specialty Vehicles of Ohio.

According to the NHTSA's National Center for Statistics and Analysis, in the five-year period from 2002 to 2006, 3,262 Native Americans lost their lives in motor vehicle traffic crashes. Of those, 1,864 (or 57 percent) involved an alcohol-impaired driver or motorcycle operator who was at or above the legal limit of .08.

However, impaired driving is one of the deadliest problems not just in Indian Country, but in America. The NHTSA estimates that in 2007 there were approximately 13,000 total fatalities in crashes involving a driver or motorcycle rider with a blood alcohol content (BAC) of .08 or higher. And the Federal Bureau of Investigation estimates that there were about 1.5 million DWI (driving while impaired) arrests in 2007 – an average of 167 arrests per hour.

The BIA Office of Justice Services is responsible for managing the Bureau's law enforcement, detention facilities and tribal courts programs, either directly in tribal communities or by funding tribally administered programs through contract and grants.

The IHSP, a part of the Indian Affairs Office of Facilities, Environmental and Cultural Resources Division of Safety and Risk Management, is charged with meeting the traffic safety needs of the 564 federally recognized tribes. One of its goals is to decrease alcohol-related motor vehicle crash injuries and fatalities in Indian Country.

NHTSA's mission is to save lives, prevent injuries and reduce economic costs due to road traffic crashes, through education, research, safety standards and enforcement activity. For more information, visit www.nhtsa.gov.