

MEDIA RELEASE

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WEEDUI, Marijuana and Driving Under the Influence Ventura County works to reduce Drugged Driving

(OXNARD, Calif.) – The Ventura County Behavioral Health Department has released the first phase of its campaign aimed at curbing the growing number of DUI arrests involving drug use. The campaign uses the term “WEEDUI” (pronounced ‘weed-you-eye’) to convey simply and directly the risk of arrest for drugged driving. “This is the first in a series of messages designed to raise awareness about the public safety risks of driving after using marijuana, commonly known as weed,” said David Tovar, the project’s manager.

“Nationally, 10.3 million people reported driving under the influence of marijuana in the past year, and one of every eight high school seniors said they had driven after smoking marijuana in the last two weeks.” said Patrick Zarate, Division Manager for Ventura County’s Alcohol and Drug Programs. “We also know that number of DUI arrestees who admit to marijuana use on the day of their arrest has been rising here in Ventura County in recent years. So this is a call to action; it’s urging young adults to make smart decisions, so they do not end up with a WEEDUI.”

The WEEDUI campaign plan is to capture the attention of teens and young adults, showing the realities of marijuana-impaired driving, without regard to its legal status. Using funds provided by the California Office of Traffic Safety, Ventura County Behavioral Health is working with other agencies and local media outlets to help change social norms around marijuana and driving. Using fact-based approaches, the Department’s objective is to change the opinions of young adults, who represent the highest-risk group for WEEDUI, according to Zarate.

“Drugged driving is a new concept for most people. While many of us know about drunk driving, we do not think of the realities of drug-impaired driving,” said Zarate. “We are taking proactive steps to offset other messaging teens and young adults are hearing.”

“Forty-six percent (46%) of people in our DUI program who used drugs other than alcohol on the day of their DUI arrest in Ventura County, used marijuana,” said Dan Hicks, Prevention Services Manager. “And it’s surprising how many people don’t recognize that a doctor’s recommendation is no excuse — it can still be a crime and can cost you more than \$10,000.” The County proposed the WEEDUI Drugged Driving Summit for September of this year, and this media campaign as a way to raise awareness and help change local perception of driving high, according to Hicks.

Office of Traffic Safety Director Rhonda Craft states clearly, “We are working to reduce fatalities due to impaired driving, and drugged driving is an emerging reality. We want to be out in front of the issue.”

Funding for the grant is from the California Office of Traffic Safety, through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. For more information go to: www.venturacountylimits.org/weedui

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