



News Release No. 26

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## VIRGINIA TRAFFIC FATALITIES DRAMATICALLY DECLINE OVER MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND

RICHMOND – Preliminary numbers indicate that traffic fatalities on Virginia highways for the 2009 Memorial Day weekend are the lowest in at least 10 years. As of noon May 26, 2009, five fatal crashes have been reported to the Virginia State Police. Last year, a total of 18 people died in 14 crashes during the same holiday period. The 2008 death toll was the highest since 1998. During the past decade, the Memorial Day weekend has averaged 12.8 traffic deaths.

The four-day statistical counting period for the holiday weekend began at 12:01 a.m. Friday, May 22, 2009, and ended at midnight Monday, May 25, 2009. During that time, five people died in five traffic crashes on Virginia's highways. The fatal crashes occurred in the counties of Bland, Clarke, Loudoun, Pittsylvania and Tazewell.

"To experience such an extreme decline in traffic fatalities over such a heavily-traveled holiday weekend is truly encouraging," said Colonel W. Steven Flaherty, Virginia State Police Superintendent. "There has been a tremendous amount of enforcement activity going on during the past week on Virginia interstates, Route 60, Route 29 and other critical roadways. Hopefully through these layered enforcement activities and outreach efforts, more Virginians are making a concerted effort to drive safer and more responsibly."

Of the five people killed, four were not wearing safety belts. Alcohol was a factor in at least one of the fatal crashes. State Police responded to a total of 653 traffic crashes statewide.

During the Memorial Day weekend, Virginia State Police participated in the annual *Operation C.A.R.E.* The *Combined Accident Reduction Effort* (C.A.R.E.) is a state-sponsored, national program designed to reduce crashes, fatalities and injuries caused by speeding, impaired driving and failure to use occupant restraints.

As a result of troopers' increased visibility, checkpoints and traffic enforcement efforts on Virginia's highways during the holiday weekend, 10,341 speeders and 3,007 reckless drivers were stopped and cited. State Police also arrested 175 impaired drivers. A total of 1,031 safety belt violations and 347 child safety seat restraint violations were also cited by state troopers and supervisors.

For the remainder of this week, Virginia State Police will be continuing its enforcement and educational outreach participation in the national *Click It or Ticket* traffic safety initiative. As of last fall, only 80 percent of Virginians were buckling up while riding in a vehicle. Research shows that if 10 percent more Virginians used seatbelts an estimated 1,652 lives could be saved and 22,732 serious injuries avoided each year on a national level. More information on this study and other *Click It or Ticket* statistics and facts are available at [www.vsp.virginia.gov](http://www.vsp.virginia.gov).



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### STATEWIDE MEDIA CONTACTS:

VSP HQ Ms. C.Geller (804)674-2789	Richmond (804)553-3445	Culpeper Sgt. Tyler (540)829-7713	Appomattox (434)352-7128	Wytheville Sgt. Conroy (276)223-4242	Chesapeake Sgt. Cotten (757)424-6827	Salem/Roanoke Sgt. Carpentieri (540)375-9598	Fairfax (804)674-2789
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