

# Drunk drivers face tougher laws in 1992

By Wayne Paal  
staff writer

At Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) headquarters in Livonia, they're counting the days until the New Year.

That's because new, tougher state drunk driving laws won't go into effect Jan. 1, capping nearly a decade of lobbying from MADD and its supporters.

"We may even have a little celebration here," said Sandi Wolf, administrator of the Wayne County MADD Chapter. This is something we've sought for a long, long time. In Oakland County, there is a similar sense of accomplishment. "Not only will the roads and highways be safer," said Theresa T. McNeil, spokeswoman for the chapter which has about 350 members.

"But the judicial process will be enhanced. Victims won't be in limbo waiting for the legal system to work."

National Drunk and Drugged Driving Awareness Week is Dec. 7-13 and MADD and its local supporters are using the event to call attention to the new laws.

Signed by Gov. John Engler in August, the laws provide a minimum 30-day license suspension for even a first-time offender convicted of driving under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs. They also provide a minimum 48-hour jail stay, or 10 days' community service, upon a second conviction.

More serious penalties include a 15-year felony sentence for drunken drivers involved in fatalities and a five-year felony sentence for those who cause long-term injuries.

"IT MAKES death by drunk driv-

ing a distinct charge," Wolf said. "Before, it has been treated as a misdemeanor or as negligent homicide."

MADD isn't the only group applauding the new laws.

"This is going to make it more difficult for people to continue to drive drunk," said Thomas Reel, executive director of the Traffic Safety Association of Michigan. "In the past, it was fairly easy to get your license back, but that's no longer going to be the case."

There two major changes that will make it tougher for convicted drivers to regain their licenses:

- License return fees have been raised to \$125, a \$85 increase. The maximum penalty for driving on a license that has been suspended, revoked or denied will be raised to \$500 for a first offense and \$1,000 for a second offense. The previous maximum penalties were \$100 and \$500.

- Persons with more than one drunk driving conviction will no longer be able to appeal for license return because of economic hardship.

**DRUNKEN DRIVING** is the No. 1 cause of traffic fatalities, in Michigan and nationwide, Reel said. There were 738 drunk driving fatalities in Michigan during 1990 and 23,114 related injuries, according to MADD.

The new laws can't help but force police to crack down on drunken drivers, said Thomas Bonner, president of the county police chiefs association.

"In all likelihood, there's going to be a lot of effort," Bonner said. "This isn't going to be ignored."

If there's a problem, he added, it's

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— Theresa T. McNeil  
Oakland County MADD

that police departments must step up services during a time of tight budgets.

"I know from our standpoint there's a manpower shortage now," said Bonner, chief of police in Taylor. "We hope people won't be cut loose because officers can't come to court. But then, the legislators didn't confer with police chiefs when they passed the laws."

Even MADD officials acknowledge the new laws won't stop all drunken drivers.

"There are some people whose behavior is habitual," Wolf said. "But, for many drivers, these new laws should make a difference."

"At the very least, it shows people that there are consequences to driving drunk."

MADD's annual "Tie One on for Safety" red ribbon campaign continues. Ribbons are available at MADD headquarters 15185 Farmington Road, as well as at numerous Wayne County businesses. Call MADD, 422-6233 for a list of sites.

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The sale will be Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sundays from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Santa Claus himself will be on hand most of the time. Signs will direct visitors to sale headquarters at Camp Oakland, 930 East Drahner Road, Oakland.

For information call 628-2551.

Shoppers may cut their own trees, or turn the job over to young residents of Camp Oakland who will be on hand to help.

Scotch pines cost \$25, and blue spruce cost \$40. Proceeds will benefit Camp Oakland Youth Programs' services for children and adolescents.

Items in the gift shop were made

in Camp Oakland's small production workshop, where young men learn to work together in producing wooden centerpieces, wreaths, heart shelves, decorated sleds, foot stools, reindeer, napkin holders, potato bins, bird houses and heart tables.

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