



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Gwendolyn Mitchell/Laurel Anderson
Office of Public Affairs
(408) 299-5119

Joy Alexiou
Public Health Department
(408) 885-4164

\$1.15 Million Grant Seeks to Improve Traffic Safety

SAN JOSE, CALIF.— More than 9,500 people were injured and almost 100 killed in Santa Clara County during 2006, according to the California Highway Patrol. For more than 10 years, the Santa Clara County Public Health Department's Traffic Safe Communities Network (TSCN) has focused on traffic-related safety issues such as alcohol and impaired driving, bicycle and pedestrian safety, and roadway safety. The State Office of Traffic Safety has awarded Public Health \$1,153,831 in funding through September 30, 2009, to continue successful TSCN programs including the Driving Under the Influence (DUI) Courts in Schools Stop on Red campaign, Safe Routes to School, and Juvenile Traffic Diversion.

“Reducing traffic-related deaths in Santa Clara County must start with educating our youth on traffic safety issues,” said Supervisor Ken Yeager, Co-Chair of the Traffic Safe Communities Network. “Traffic Safe Communities Network holds real DUI trials in local high schools to help young drivers understand the consequences of drinking and driving.” In October, TSCN conducted a real DUI trial at San Jose State University as an innovative strategy to help reduce community alcohol problems, including motor vehicle crashes. This prevention program is designed to help students make more informed choices for resisting alcohol industry, media, peer, and social pressures to drink.

According to the American Medical Association, underage drinking is a factor in nearly half of all automobile crashes. Motor vehicle crashes remain the leading cause of death for 15-19 year olds - with the primary collision factor being alcohol. The next DUI Courts in Schools trial will be at Monte Vista High School in Cupertino on March 21, 2008.

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\$1.15 Million Grant Seeks to Improve Traffic Safety– Page 2

TSCN also focuses its efforts on reducing motor vehicle crashes caused by red light running through its *Stop on Red* campaign. In 2006, there were 1,046 collisions in Santa Clara County where running a red light was the primary cause. The crashes caused 1,014 injuries and four deaths. The number of crashes in 2006 was the lowest in ten years. During the month of August, increased patrols in 10 police departments cited 398 drivers for running red lights at targeted intersections in an effort to further reduce the number of crashes in the County.

Bicycle and pedestrian injuries rank among the five leading causes of unintentional injury hospitalizations for youth 5-15 years old in Santa Clara County. The new OTS grant will fund two programs targeted at this age group. The programs will develop and implement school traffic safety plans, educate youth and parents on traffic safety, and install pedestrian count down signals where needed. Additionally, TSCN will work with local law enforcement agencies to expand its “traffic school for kids” for youth who are cited for bicycle and pedestrian violations like failing to wear a helmet.

“It’s a win-win-win-win situation for parents, youth, law enforcement and public health officials,” explained Dr. Mary Fenstersheib, Health Officer for Santa Clara County and co-chair of TSCN. “Rather than paying a fine, parents and youth will benefit from receiving properly-fitted bike helmets which in turn decreases their risk of getting serious head injuries or even dying from a crash. In addition to their everyday role as enforcers, law enforcement officers will become public health educators by providing youth and parents with injury prevention messages.”

TSCN is a countywide coalition of public health and traffic safety professionals working together to prevent and control traffic-related injuries, fatalities, and health care costs. Participating partners include the Santa Clara County Public Health Department, city and county law enforcement agencies, city engineering, bicycle and pedestrian advocacy groups, Santa Clara County Office of Education, local schools, American Medical Response, Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), Santa Clara County Superior Court, Office of the District Attorney, Office of the Public Defender, Santa Clara County Roads and Airports Department, Stanford Trauma Services, and other traffic safety stakeholders.

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