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DA's No Refusal Initiative to Target DWIs during Weekend Holidays

(Houston, Tx) – The District Attorney's Office No Refusal Program, which filed almost 300 DWI charges in its first month of expanded operations, will deploy countywide to curb impaired motorists during the especially dangerous upcoming holiday weekends, District Attorney Patricia Lykos announced Wednesday.

Harris County prosecutors and support personnel will be working with all area police agencies during the No Refusal weekends for Christmas Eve and Christmas, and New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. Catherine Evans, Chief of the District Attorney's Vehicular Crimes Section, explained that those times are typically associated with festivities involving driving and alcohol or other intoxicants.

"There are sensible options available for everyone to celebrate without endangering themselves or others," Evans said. "Enjoy your holidays by making smart driving choices – call a cab, call a friend, get a room – just don't drive drunk."

The Texas Department of Transportation recently awarded a three-year grant to enable Harris County prosecutors and support personnel to provide the No Refusal initiative every weekend. They team with police to get warrants for mandatory blood testing of suspected DWI drivers who refuse to submit to voluntary breath tests for intoxicants

During the eight weekend nights of deployment in November, the inaugural month of the expanded program, No Refusal prosecutors filed 299 charges for first or second DWI offenses. The 97 warrants for blood draws in that period were about 34 percent of the 382 issued during No Refusal deployments for the first 11 months of 2010. Evans said that more people are electing to provide breath specimens when requested, as word gets around about No Refusal.

There also were consistently higher levels of alcohol reported for those who declined breath tests and had their blood drawn in November. That was especially true for second-offender DWIs. They averaged .130 for breath tests, compared to .192 for blood tests. Legal impairment is presumed at .08 or higher.

Evans commended the cooperation with law enforcement agencies for No Refusal. She noted that the participation reflects that the initiative spans the county. In November, the DA's program obtained 56 search warrants for blood tests for the Houston Police Department, and 16 for the Harris County Sheriff's Office. Agencies with five or less warrants included Harris County Constables' Precincts 8, 5 and 4; the Department of Public Safety; and police departments of Pasadena, Humble, Metro, Tomball, Webster, Jersey City, Friendswood and the University of Houston Downtown. (end)