

From the Office of the Sheriff:

Recently I sought the definitions of two important terms we use in law enforcement. One, *acceptable* is defined as “capable or worthy of being accepted, satisfactory or adequate.” Many of your questions are; what are the acceptable miles per hour one can drive over the speed limit before I get a citation? What is an acceptable traffic fatality rate? What is an acceptable level of blood alcohol for driving?

The answer to all these questions will vary greatly. These questions and society’s answer are the basis our legislature should use to create new laws, how we enforce the laws, and how we use our most powerful tool – *discretion*. By definition, “individual choice or judgment, power of free decision or latitude on choice.” Where am I going with this?

Two weeks ago we were honored to have a law enforcement roundtable discussion in Juneau. We were privileged to have WI Attorney General J. B Van Hollen with us to discuss the most pressing issues we have in law enforcement. The majority of our discussion revolved around our current “social disease” - impaired driving, the costs of which are not socially acceptable.

Lately, there has been a ground swell of anger over recent high profile traffic fatalities in which the offender is a repeat impaired driver or operating after revocation. Two recent arrests in Dodge County by repeat drunk drivers whom had not had a valid DL for year’s shows the ineffectiveness of lengthy revocations. Yet, our legislature is now looking into increasing the fines, the revocation periods, and longer jail sentences. This may impress the citizens but we in law enforcement know fines and revocations mean nothing to the repeat drunk driver, they will continue to drive. Not acceptable!

My philosophy on impaired driving is very simple. If law enforcement has more means to identify impaired drivers, drivers will drive drunk less for fear of arrest. Today, impaired drivers do not fear being stopped as they know our resources are slim and we are busy responding to other calls for service.

During the round table, I suggested two very simple, reasonable changes we can make in Wisconsin that will protect our families from this social disease. 1) Allow sobriety check points and, 2) make failure to wear a seat belt a “primary stop”. Currently you can not be pulled over for not wearing your seat belt. The state has lost millions in federal highway safety \$\$ because of this foolish provision in our statutes. Lobbyists feel if we had this ability more people would be arrested for impaired driving. Imagine that, having a law that would allow us to reduce impaired driving!

Sobriety checkpoints are controversial and in some states have gone to the Supreme Court, yet ruled constitutional. I heard an elected official say he was against them because he should not be subject to this type of stop while he drove his family to church. Not acceptable! This is the most foolish thing I have heard. We do not arrest many drunks on their way to church as they are usually still sleeping it off! But, the mere fact that one could be subject to a checkpoint will in itself, reduce impaired driving.

My hope is that our elected officials at every level provide law enforcement the tools that allow us to do our jobs, protecting the public. Make changes that will make a difference, something with

teeth. I assure you the church going public would not have to fear being detained on their way to church. We would use our discretion. However, if you're out on Saturday night having fun, the potential of you being stopped at a sobriety checkpoint may motivate you to stop at four beers verses having eight. That type of policy is acceptable and will enhance our ability to improve the safety on our highways. Thanks for listening, tnehs@co.dodge.wi.us.