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2013-12-23 / Commentary

## Holiday mistletoe, not tombstone

BY SCOTT MACMASTER



The holiday season always seems to creep up on us ever so silently, then overtake our lives in a flurry of preparations and parties. One minute, the celebrations appear as a distant glimmer and the next, we're blinded by to-do lists and deadlines.

In between the flashing of lights and smiles and wrapping up gifts along with another year, please take the time to ensure these holidays are as safe as possible for you and your

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family.

Statistically, the time surrounding Christmas and New Year's claims the most lives from drunken driving than any other comparable time of year in the United States.

In fact, the numbers are more than double. During the holiday season, there are an average of two to three fatalities every half hour as result of an alcoholrelated crash.

Teenagers are in an especially precarious situation when it comes to drinking, driving and accidents. They are inexperienced drivers and are more likely to be involved in roadside accidents than their older counterparts. In fact, automobile accidents are the number one cause of death in people age 15 to 20, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

While adults are typically a bit more aware of when they have had enough, teens are less accustomed to knowing the limits of their bodies.

Additionally, teenagers are more likely to be influenced by their peers to consume more without ensuring they will not be driving. It is easy to understand how the combination of drinking and driving can result in tragedy for our teenage population.

The simplest and most effective way to make sure your teenager does not become a statistic is to prevent dangerous behavior from occurring in the first place.

While your children are home from school on vacation, break away from your party planning to get a firm grasp on theirs. Talk with them about your expectations surrounding alcohol use and inform them of the dangers of underage drinking. Understand that they have free time on their hands, and be aware they may be tempted to mix boredom with the opportunity to experiment.

Teach your teen how to avoid situations that can become potentially dangerous for them. More importantly, strategize with them about how to escape detrimental scenarios they may find themselves in. Equip them with the know how and the confidence to walk away from friends who are drinking, doing drugs, or engaging in risky behavior.

One fantastic way to empower your teen and to help make the holiday season safer for everyone is to introduce eTip, the anonymous text-a-tip service that allows anyone to report underage drinking, illegal drug use and other concerns that endanger youth.

All tips are encrypted and anonymous, so you and your teen can report parties or dangerous behavior, preferably before it occurs.

The eTip service is available in Sagadahoc County, Brunswick and Harpswell, where residents can send anonymous tips directly to police in three convenient ways: by texting the word 'eTip' to 274637 (CRIMES); by submitting it online at [www.midcoastcasa.org](http://www.midcoastcasa.org); or via the free "Tip Submit" app for smart phones.

Law enforcement will be doing its part to ensure the safety of your community, too.

In addition to following up on your eTips, we will be out in full force keeping the roads safe through the "Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over Campaign."



Saturated patrols will be covering as much ground as possible to curb drunken driving.


We will also be enforcing the zero-tolerance laws and charging anyone younger than 21 who is behind the wheel with alcohol in their system.

Let's make this holiday season one that defies the statistics. With your vigilance and our resources, we can make the start of the New Year one to celebrate — for all the right reasons.

SCOTT MACMASTER is chief of police in Richmond, a loving father of three and a member of Communities Against Substance Abuse.

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