

Arrests, deaths due to drunk driving on the rise in Nebraska

Written by Bella Caracta

OMAHA, Neb. (WOWT) - Driving under the influence has consequences — deadly ones.

“He took my mom’s life needlessly,” said Toby Antonson, whose mom was killed by a drunk driver. “It’s very tough the pain that he caused.”

They’re consequences that his family has to live with.

Latest numbers from the Nebraska State Patrol show troopers made more than 800 arrests so far this year, which is a whopping 23% increase compared to this time last year.

“Each one of those DUI arrests is a potential life saver,” said Colonel John Bolduc, superintendent of NSP.

Fatalities are up as well; NSP reported a 26% increase compared to this time last year.

“If you’re going to drink at all, just don’t drive. It’s as simple as that,” said Bolduc.

Project Extra Mile is an organization in the metro that works to address excessive drinking. 6 News spoke with the executive director about what may help explain this trend and why Nebraska sticks out compared to other states.

“It’s our policies, so we don’t have great policies,” said Chris Wagner. “Having cheap alcohol, having alcohol available everywhere you go.”

Though it may seem its like that everywhere, most states don’t allow all kinds of alcohol, including liquor, to be sold in grocery stores. Nebraska does.

About 20 states restrict the number of liquor licenses. Nebraska doesn’t.

Some states prohibit “happy hour,” which offers discounted drinks in the timeframe between after work and before dinner, to discourage excessive drinking. Nebraska doesn’t.

Both NSP and Project Extra Mile stress personal accountability, but Wagner in particular calls upon the state legislature to consider a balance between economic development and public safety.