

Legislature to consider ways to deter intoxicated drivers

Checkpoints, lowering legal blood alcohol content possible

AUSTIN (AP) — A state senator introduced legislation Monday aimed at stepping up the war against drunken driving, including one to authorize "sobriety checkpoints" on Texas streets and highways.

Sen. David Sibley, R-Waco, said such police checkpoints are proving an effective weapon in other states in convincing motorists to stay sober or stay off the road.

"Fear of arrest is the most effective deterrent to drunk driving. Research has shown that sobriety checkpoints are the best way to make people aware of the

risk of arrest," Sibley said.

Another bill would lower the limit at which a Texan would be considered legally drunk, from a 0.10 percent blood-alcohol concentration to 0.05 percent.

The lawmaker also proposed a new legal limit of 0.02 percent for those under 21. That measure would provide a variety of punishments — from taking away drivers' licenses to requiring community service — to help dissuade younger Texans from driving while drunk, Sibley said.

According to the Department of Public Safety, 1,219 Texans died and 33,203 were injured in 1993 due to drunken driving accidents.

Senior Sgt. Sam Cox of the Austin Police Department said officers who see the carnage drunken drivers cause are enthusiastic about sobriety checkpoints.

"We don't have to put up with the unnecessary death. A lot of

people still have the idea that traffic collisions involving death is a socially accepted homicide," Cox said.

"But I'm here to tell you ... dead is dead, whether you're killed by a 4,000-pound automobile or whether you're shot with a bullet. We're still in the state of Texas killing more people due to drunk drivers than we are guns," he said.

Bill Lewis, legislative liaison for Mothers Against Drunk Driving, said he doubted that Texans would find sobriety checkpoints intrusive. He likened them to baggage checks airline passengers undergo before boarding planes.

"The public does not object to passing through sobriety checkpoints because they also don't like the idea of sharing the highway with a drunk behind the wheel of a two-ton weapon," Lewis said.

Litter control officers try to educate nation of trashers

Education, recycling important to ensure safe environment for all

SHERMAN — "I guess you can say I'm just a country boy come to greatness," said Jim White, Grayson County's litter control officer. "I work trash."

White is the county's last line of defense against the people who dump their garbage problems illegally on the rest of us.

White said that there has been a lot of progress on the dumping problem since he was given the job by the county commissioners in 1989. He said when he started he was only one of two people in the entire state specifically in charge of a county's litter control problem, although there are now about 20 to 25 state-wide.

"When I started five years ago, we had 60 calls a month on average, pick-up sized loads, about five yards. Now we're

down to about 20-30 calls a month," White said. He added that dump sites now are usually just one or two sacks.

He said that this job isn't quite as exciting as some others he's had. Before he came to Grayson County for the fishing, he worked as an investigator of major crimes in west Texas for 17 years.

One day, he said, he realized that he was 200 miles in any direction from the nearest fishing hole, and so he packed up and left. When he got here, he heard about a job with the county as a full time litter control officer, applied for it and got it. He said that he doesn't miss the old days as an investigator at all.

"I've had all my butt-kickin' and door-kickin' a long time ago," he said.

One of his favorite tactics, said, is to hide in dumpsters and wait for someone to come him with an illegal load of garbage. "Sometimes it's fishing, you have to learn to listen to birds singing."

"There are three things I cannot abide in this world," White said, "and those are liars, thieves and trashers. Thieves take your money, take your faith, and trashers are taking our world."

Now that most of the litter control problems are education, he said, he wants to focus on education. He said fill space is limited, and he needs to think about what's put in the garbage.

"If you can compost it, post it, if you can recycle it, cycle it," he said. "The average person generates something like four tons of trash a year, someone told me. We can't take that away forever."



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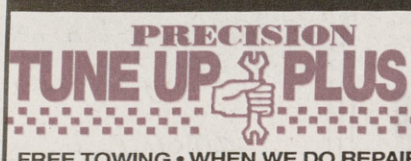


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