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AAA: Tropics Rule For Holiday Travelers

December 16, 2012 5:20 PM

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MIAMI (CBSMiami) – While staying at home and spending time with the family is a time honored tradition, lots of people are planning to head out of town.

In a recent AAA Consumer Pulse Survey, of those who said they had or were making travel plans 75 percent said their holiday plans are a little unusual because they will spend it on a cruise, at the beach or visiting another country.

While the holiday travelers (62 percent) said they prefer to stay at home during the holidays, they're still interested in taking a nontraditional vacation during the holiday season.

Of the top four unorthodox holiday vacation plans, the tropics seem to rule.


Sixty three percent said they planned to take a cruise while another 50 percent said they've booked a trip for a tropical vacation. Thirty seven percent said they were planning a trip to the beach.

Fifty five percent said they were going to take a trip abroad

Although travelers are

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vacation, the majority of them (56%) have not taken one in the past five years. Instead, travelers have continued to visit and stay with family and friends.

"The year-end holiday season is the busiest travel time of the year," said Jessica Brady, AAA spokeswoman for The Auto Club Group. "Whether families plan a traditional holiday at grandma's house or a cruise to the Caribbean, one thing is certain, being with family and friends remains the most important factor during the holiday season."

The survey was conducted online at the end of October and the respondents were from the AAA's Southern region; Florida, Georgia, and Tennessee) from October 25 - 27, 2012. A total of 629 residents completed the survey. The survey has a maximum margin of error of +/- 3.9 percentage points.



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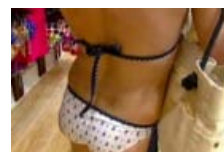
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Posted: Fri 8:24 AM, Dec 28, 2012

Reporter: AAA [Email](#)

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New Year's Ranks As Deadliest Day on Roads

AAA Release

TAMPA, Fla. (December 27, 2012) – As Americans prepare for holiday celebrations, AAA reminds drivers and passengers alike of the dangers on the roads this New Year's Day, which consistently ranks as the year's deadliest day for alcohol-related fatalities. To strengthen efforts to protect the public against drunk drivers and reduce alcohol-related traffic deaths, AAA is announcing its support of ignition interlocks for all convicted DUI offenders, and offers important safety advice to partygoers.



AAA is not alone in its concern about impaired driving or strong support for tough policies for convicted drunk drivers. According to the 2012 Traffic Safety Culture Index conducted by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, more than nine in 10 drivers consider it a serious threat to their personal safety when others drink and drive, and nearly all (97 percent) surveyed find it unacceptable for a driver to get behind the wheel when they have had too much to drink. To prevent these dangers, nearly eight in 10 Americans support requiring ignition interlocks for all convicted DUI offenders, even if it's their first conviction.

Research has identified ignition interlock devices (IIDs) as a proven way to save lives. AAA's recommendation to require the use of IIDs for all convicted offenders is grounded in research, which shows that IIDs are more effective than other methods at reducing re-arrest among convicted drunk drivers and keeping impaired drivers off the road.

AAA is reaching out to motorists on the heels of a recent National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) decision to support laws requiring IID use for all first-time DUI offenders—one of several new recommendations issued to help curb alcohol-related traffic injury and death. "I commend AAA for stepping up for safety," said NTSB Chairman Deborah Hersman. "Technologies, such as ignition interlocks, will reduce alcohol-related crashes on our nation's roadways. We look forward to working alongside AAA and its clubs to eliminate the nation's top killer on our roadways – impaired driving."

Preventing drinking and driving is a shared responsibility to save lives. While AAA advocates expanding IID use to all persons convicted of drunk driving, New Year's Eve partygoers can do their part by heeding the following advice:

- Always plan ahead to designate a non-drinking driver before any party or celebration begins
- Never get behind the wheel of a car when you've been drinking alcohol – even after just one drink
- Never ride as a passenger in a car driven by someone who has been drinking alcohol – even after just one drink
- Do not hesitate to take the keys from friends or family members who may be impaired
- Call a taxi for a friend in need
- Be a responsible host in reminding guests to stay safe and always offer alcohol-free beverages
- If you encounter an impaired driver on the road, keep a safe distance and ask a passenger to call 911 (or pull over to a safe location to make the call yourself)
- Remember: prescription, over-the-counter medications and illegal drugs also can impair your ability to drive safely

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Visit PreventDUI.AAA.com for impaired driving facts, transportation alternatives and expert advice. AAA encourages visitors to Take the Pledge to drive drug and alcohol-free.

The Auto Club Group (ACG) is the second largest AAA club in North America. ACG and its affiliates provide membership, travel, insurance and financial services offerings to approximately 8.8 million members across 11 states and two U.S. territories including Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Michigan, Nebraska, North Dakota, Tennessee, Wisconsin, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands; most of Illinois and Minnesota; and a portion of Indiana. ACG belongs to the national AAA federation with nearly 53 million members in the United States and Canada and whose mission includes protecting and advancing freedom of mobility and improving traffic safety.

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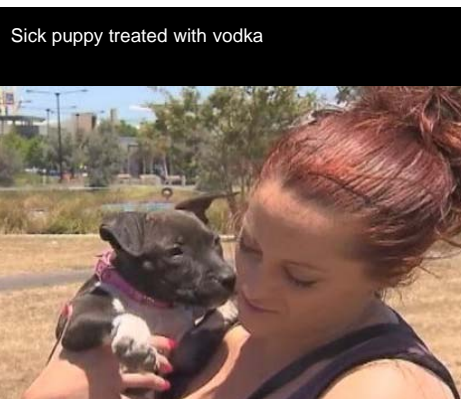
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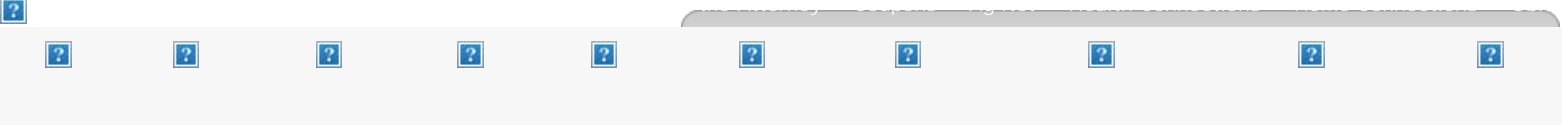
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Law enforcement: Don't drink and drive this New Year's

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Posted: Dec 28, 2012 11:31 PM EST
Updated: Jan 02, 2013 11:33 PM EST

By Ashton Pellom - [bio](#) | [email](#)

ALBANY, GA (WALB) - Georgia State Patrol troopers and local law enforcement agencies will be out in full force the next few days looking for drunk drivers.

Last year there were seven fatal accidents and 262 DUI arrests on Georgia's roads during the New Year's holiday period.

"They think that they're just driving a short distance, but everything is going to be fine. It's that short distance that they're driving that can be deadly," said GSP Trooper Robert Corbin.

Authorities want those numbers to drop drastically and so does AAA, which is now pushing for Ignition Interlock Devices (IID's) to be installed on driver's vehicles after their first DUI conviction.

IID's are devices which motorists have to blow into before they can start their car. If they're not sober, the car won't start.

Courts usually order this to be placed in cars after someone's second DUI conviction, but AAA wants it to be in after the first conviction.

"DUI's are getting pricier and pricier," said Dougherty County DUI school owner Debra Storm.

Storm says she supports AAA's proposal because she believes these devices can save lives.

She even says she has students who are grateful the disabling devices are in their car so they aren't able to drive drunk.

"Any conviction of DUI has a history behind it of many more times when the person has driven, but not been caught and so I really believe it will reduce deaths from DUI's," said Storm.

If convicted for DUI storm says the aftermath isn't cheap and is a hassle.

"There's the fine plus there are court costs, there are lawyer costs, there's time away from your job because of incarceration," said Storm.

Now Law enforcement wants to make sure everyone makes it home safely on New Year's.

"Have a great time. You should celebrate, but make sure you're safe on the highways," said Trooper Corbin.

1 in every 3 crashes is alcohol related here in the state of Georgia. A designated driver is recommended for anybody who plans to drink while out this holiday travel period.

GSP officials say the New Year holiday crackdown started Friday.

Last year, troopers investigated 296 crashes over the New Year holiday period that resulted in 172 injuries and seven deaths.



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AAA to open new shop in Wheaton

Facility will include a repair shop for "light automotive repair"



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AAA hopes to open a car service center and traditional insurance and travel office in Wheaton. (Michelle Manchir, Chicago Tribune / December 18, 2012)

By Michelle Manchir, Chicago Tribune reporter

11:44 a.m. CST, December 18, 2012

MAPS

1790 S Blanchard St, Wheaton, IL 60189, USA

An automotive assistanceshopwill soon take over an empty former Walgreen's store in Wheaton.

AAA recently gained approval from a city panel to move

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forward with its project to put a car repairshop and travel and insurance sales store at 1790 Blanchard Street, near the Town Square Shopping Center along Naperville Road.

J.Q. Freeman, a spokesman for the consultant company working with AAA, said the location will house a newer concept from the more than 100-year-old company best known for providing roadside auto assistance to motorists.

The shop will include a repair shop for oil changes, tire changes and other "light automotive repair," Freeman said, while still being a headquarters for insurance sales and travel options. Car service will be available to non-members of AAA, in addition to members.

"The idea behind the line is to offer customers a cost effective solution to maintaining their vehicle once their dealer warranty expires," according to a memo from AAA. "Today, the membership to non-membership ratio is about 50/50."

The type of auto repair work will not include heavy engine or transmission work, Freeman said. There is expected to be a shuttle to take waiting customers home or to work.

The type of store proposed will be the first of its kind in Illinois, Freeman said. Currently there are about 50 in the U.S., mostly in Southern states and in Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

The developer will still need Wheaton City Council to sign off on the project before moving forward, but the Planning and Zoning Board voted 5-0 to approve the necessary permit, with the conditions that the developer agrees to add landscaping long Naperville Road adjacent to the building, and obscure the glass on the building to conceal a view of the auto repair component of the building.

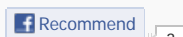
According to plans from the developer, the exterior of the building will remain mostly unchanged but the interior will need to be remodeled to fit the needs of the proposed use.

If the project gains approval, the current AAA Insurance office at 2 Danada Square West would close and the company would operate only the new, expanded care center/branch location. All current employees would move to the new location, said a spokeswoman for AAA, Beth Mosher.

Freeman said, if the city council approves the project, the shop would likely open in the Fall of 2013.

mmanchir@tribune.com

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Grieving mom grateful for 'Kelsey's Law' cell phone legislation



By [The Associated Press](#)

on December 22, 2012 at 2:15 PM, updated December 22, 2012 at 2:16 PM

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BY JOHN FLESHER, The Associated Press

TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. (AP) — On a winter morning in 2010, Kelsey Dawn Raffaele was driving home from a friend's house and chatting on her cell phone when she crashed, ending her life at age 17 — and setting her devastated mother on a mission to spare others the same fate.

Bonnie Raffaele won a bittersweet victory when the Michigan Legislature [passed a bill prohibiting young novice drivers from using a cell phone while behind the wheel](#). The measure, which at one point appeared in trouble because of opposition from House Speaker Jase Bolger, won final approval a few hours before lawmakers adjourned this month. Thirty-two states have similar laws.

[Gov. Rick Snyder said Friday he was "generally supportive"](#) of what officially would be known as "Kelsey's Law."

"I will most likely end up signing it. The concept is a good one," Snyder said during a year-end news conference, noting that he also has a 16-year-old daughter named Kelsey, who got her license last summer.

The next step, Raffaele said, will be spreading the word to parents, police, teachers and anyone else in a position to make a difference — especially teens themselves.

"I'm a firm believer that nobody should be on the phone when they're driving, but my big concern is the kids," said Raffaele, 48, who lives in the Upper Peninsula town of Sault Ste. Marie. "They're the most vulnerable, the most inexperienced."

The bill applies to holders of Level 1 licenses, who must be accompanied by a parent, guardian or another licensed driver at least 21 years old, and those with Level 2 licenses, who can drive alone with some limits on hours and carrying young passengers. It exempts Level 3 drivers, who have full privileges.

Sgt. Chris Hawkins, who handles legislative issues for the Michigan State Police, acknowledged patrol officers can't tell the status of a passing motorist simply by glancing through the car window — although the bill allows them to



Kelsey Raffaele

check anyone they suspect of violating the ban. Under most circumstances, they will enforce the law as a "secondary measure" when a driver has been stopped for another reason, he said.

"We'll see someone speeding by us and notice they're on their cell phone," Hawkins said. "We'll pull them over, and if they've got a Level 1 or 2 license, they'll get the additional citation."

The fine can reach \$100 plus court costs — and the driver's probationary license period can be lengthened. But police hope the deterrent effect will make violations a rarity, Hawkins said, just as with the state's ban on sending text messages while driving, which took effect in 2010.

Kelsey was a Level 2 driver when she crashed. She had just passed a slower-moving vehicle on a slippery road near her high school and went too far to the right, clipping a snow bank, her mother said. She apparently overcompensated by jerking the wheel to the left and veered into an oncoming car.

"She was on the phone. It was a classic case of a distracted driver," said Bonnie Raffaele, a computer technician for the Eastern Upper Peninsula Intermediate School District.

Still grieving a year later, she chatted with a friend who was a state police officer. "I guess I was at the angry point. I said, 'Something has to be done. I have to get to the kids. They have to pay attention and stop this.'"

With her husband, Ron, Raffaele created a website devoted to warning teens of the danger. She hit the road, speaking at schools as far away as Grand Rapids. And she enlisted state Sen. Howard Walker, a Traverse City Republican whose district includes the Sault Ste. Marie area, to sponsor the cell phone legislation.

"It gives parents a little added weight because they can tell a child during that probationary period, 'Don't talk on your cell phone and it's not just a suggestion — it's now the law,'" Walker said.

The Senate approved the bill in March, although some lawmakers worried it was a "slippery slope" measure that could lead to banning cell phone use for all drivers. Walker said he assured colleagues that wasn't the plan, even though some might consider it a good idea. An experienced driver will have better judgment than a new one about when it's safe to have a phone conversation, he said.

AAA Michigan, which backed the bill, said numerous studies have shown that youths are more likely to be involved in crashes involving cell phones than older, seasoned drivers.

The measure plodded through the House. Bolger, a Republican from Marshall, regarded it as an example of well-meaning efforts to "legislate behaviors that are best dealt with based on common sense and the personal sense of responsibility," spokesman Ari Adler said. "People are eating and drinking all the time in cars; that can be a distraction and a hazard. People are using all kind of technology in cars — GPS units, sophisticated entertainment."

It appeared the measure might remain bottled up in the Transportation Committee. But because it had widespread support among rank-and-file members, Bolger agreed to bring it to the floor for a vote on the session's frantic, final night. It passed, 74-33.

"I am so excited, so relieved," said a grateful Raffaele, who had testified before the committee and handed out literature to House members.

While savoring the outcome, she continues to struggle with the loss of Kelsey, whose twin sister, Courtney, is a student at Northern Michigan University in Marquette.

"To this day, I find myself thinking she's still at a friend's house," Raffaele said. "It's just ... disbelief. You just never expect to bury your child."

Associated Press writer Ed White in Detroit contributed to this story.

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Major storm dumps snow on Metro area

Airports, highways snarled nationwide by massive system

BY TONY BRISCOE
AND LAUREN ABDEL-RAZZAQ
The Detroit News

The first significant snowfall of the season blanketed Metro Detroit on Wednesday bringing flight delays, headaches for motorists and a run on staples at local stores.

The National Weather Service said the worst should be over by early today, leaving behind enough snow for the first time this winter for many sledders, skiers and outdoor enthusiasts in the lower part of the state.

With more snow anticipated overnight, accumulations as of 10 p.m. Wednesday were 6.5 inches in Ann Arbor; 6.3 inches in Troy; 6 inches in Royal Oak, Eastpointe and Brighton; 5.5 inches in Lake Orion; 5 inches in Sterling Heights; 5.2 inches in Riverview and 4.8 inches at Detroit Metro Airport in Romulus, the weather service reported.

A number of Metro Detroit cities declared snow emergencies, meaning residents can't park on streets overnight to allow for snow plowing, including Hazel Park, Eastpointe and Dearborn.

The storm was part of a massive system that had been lurking over the Tennessee Valley and Ohio Valley areas and expanded into southern Indiana on Wednesday before reaching Michigan by late morning. It started hitting the Northeast part of the country, where up to 12-18 inches is forecast, late Wednesday night.

At least six deaths were blamed on the storm, which

spawned Gulf Coast region tornadoes on Christmas Day and a historic amount of snow in Arkansas before pushing north.

While it was fun for some, the snow was a nightmare for Metro Detroit motorists and fliers.

By early Wednesday evening, AAA Michigan had serviced about 3,400 motorists — more than any other day this year — for *Please see Storm, Page 10A*



Elizabeth Conley / The Detroit News

Michael Herkowitz, an employee of The Record Collector in Ferndale, shovels the sidewalk in front of the business on Wednesday.



spinouts, accidents and dead batteries, spokeswoman Nancy Cain said.

Extra staff was on hand to field service calls and a full contingent of tow truck drivers were out around the clock, she said. "This is the first big winter blast ... so everybody is out in full force."

By 10 p.m., Michigan State Police had more than 100 reports of fender-benders and other traffic incidents across Metro Detroit, dispatchers said.

At Detroit Metropolitan Airport, delays have been categorized as "excessive," according to FlightStats.com. Dozens of flights were delayed and many were canceled.

At least 100 flights have been canceled or rerouted and at least 240 delayed by an hour or more.

Nationwide, more than 1,400 flights had been canceled by evening, according to FlightAware.com, and some airlines said they would waive change fees.

Delays of more than an hour were reported Wednesday at the three New York City-area airports, the Federal Aviation Administration said.

Salt trucks out in force

County road commissions cranked their hundreds of loaded salt trucks into high gear as the storm arrived.

Leo Ciavatta, the maintenance superintendent for the Macomb County Department of Roads, said his staff prepared for the storm by putting down brine and salt at spots known to be trouble for winter driving such as turn-arounds, bridges, highway exits and overpasses.

"It buys us time," he said Wednesday afternoon. "When the snow starts to accumulate, it'll melt and that will give us more time to get there and hit it with salt."

Craig Bryson, a spokesman for the Road Commission for Oak-

land County, said the department's 106 trucks were fully deployed as of mid-afternoon.

Cindy Dingell, deputy chief operating officer of Wayne County's Department of Public Services, said they were at full deployment with just more than 100 trucks out on 99 routes salting and breaking through the snow.

Troy Clogg, owner of Troy Clogg Landscape Associates, has had trucks on the road since the flakes began to fall.

His fleet of more than 100 plows service parking lots, sidewalks and other areas for cities along the Interstate 96 corridor as far as Lake Michigan and all the way into downtown Detroit. He said staffers began preparing for the snow Tuesday.

"It began with calling and confirming drivers and making sure all our equipment is running properly," Clogg said. "We're out there throwing salt, clearing pathways and such and all that process repeats itself every two to three hours until the snow stops."

Stockpiling staples, shovels

Metro Detroiters headed to stores to stock up on food and anything that will make snow removal easier.

At Gilbert's Pro Hardware in St. Clair Shores, customers began streaming in Wednesday morning, owner Blair Gilbert said.

"We've sold four pallets of ice melter before noon," he said. "It seems like I've already got people fighting over snow shovels."

At Heartland Market in Westland, manager Illene Savage said sales of sustainable groceries were up significantly. "(Wednesday) morning it was very, very busy. People were buying regular groceries, not holiday items," Savage said. "The day after a holiday it's usually pretty slow."

Jim Garrison, a manager at Honey Bee La Colmena on Detroit's southwest side, said once the snow started to fall, the store got much busier.

"It's definitely the weather that's driving them in here. They're definitely buying staples: milk, bread and other groceries," he said. "It looks like people are going to be eating dinner at home tonight."

Detroiters Edythe and Grant Friley braved the slick, icy roads and drove out to Lafayette Coney Island near Campus Martius during the storm. Edythe Friley didn't seem to be bothered by the weather at all.

"I'm glad to see winter come. It's Michigan," she said. "I want seasons. That's why I stay here."

Her husband didn't feel the same.

"See, I'm the opposite of my wife. I don't like snow, sleet, slush or any of that," Grant Friley said. "I'd rather it be really cold and clear."

Good weather for skating

Sisters Johanna and Avery Ferebee were among a handful of people waiting to take to the ice Wednesday at the Campus Martius ice rink downtown, even in blizzard-like conditions.

"We kind of were excited about it. We like the snow," said Johanna Ferebee, 19. The sisters are visiting family during the holidays and live in Wilmington, N.C., where, Ferebee said, "It snows sometimes but never like this."

"Our cousins are complaining about it. They wanted to stay inside," said Avery Ferebee, 18. "We just wanted to play in it."

Around midnight, the team will begin mass snow removal. "We hope to be winding down by rush hour (Thursday) morning," Clogg said.

The high temperatures for Wednesday and Thursday are expected to hover around 32 degrees, but blustery conditions could also be a problem.

Wind gusts are forecasted to be as high as 20 mph today.

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AAA issues warning on E-15 fuel

But biofuels group calls move 'irresponsible'

By Leslie Brooks Suzukamo
 lsuzukamo@pioneerpress.com

The new E-15 ethanol blend of gasoline once more has ignited controversy, with AAA on Friday, Nov. 30, saying that it may damage car engines and the ethanol industry calling the warning baseless.

Minnesota, the nation's fifth-largest ethanol producer, still has no locations selling E-15, which contains 15 percent ethanol blended with gasoline, compared with the standard 10 percent blend known as E-10. The closest locations pumping E-15 are in Iowa, Kansas and Nebraska, a state ethanol association official said.

But the wrangling over E-15 matters to Minnesota. The state ships more than three-quarters of its 1 billion gallons of annual ethanol production out of state. It is counting on driver acceptance of higher-blend ethanol fuels such as E-15 to boost sales.

Ethanol sales have hit "the blend wall," meaning the nation's gas supply has absorbed as much ethanol as it can under the 10 percent blend rules. The industry waged a long battle to get E-15 blend approved over objections from environmentalists and the petroleum industry.

The AAA said a survey showed the new E-15 blend, approved in June,

was unknown to 95 percent of consumers. Less than a fifth of cars on the road have been approved to use the fuel, and engine damage might not be covered under warranties, AAA said.

Only flex-fuel car models have been approved by automakers to use E-15, or about 12 million of the more than 240 million light-duty vehicles on the roads.

"It is clear that millions of Americans are unfamiliar with E-15, which means there is a strong possibility that many motorists may improperly fill up using this gasoline and damage their vehicle," AAA President Robert Darbelnet said in a statement.

"Bringing E-15 to the market without adequate safeguards does not responsibly meet the needs of consumers," he said.

Tim Rudnicki, executive director of the Minnesota Bio-Fuels Association, called the AAA warning "incredibly irresponsible."

E-15 received extensive testing from the U.S. Department of Energy and more evaluation from the Environmental Protection Agency, he said.

Growth Energy, a national trade association for the ethanol industry, said the AAA study "has no scientific basis and is nothing more than hollow criticism lacking any facts." said that several automak-

ers have stated their warranties do not cover fuel-related claims related to E-15 or that using the fuel may void warranty coverage. But Rudnicki said the EPA approved the fuel for all car models 2001 and newer, and some, such as the 2013 Ford Escape, say on the inside of the gas cap that it can burn E-15.

The AAA warning echoes ones used in the 1980s to try to discredit E-10, Rudnicki said. "What the AAA is doing is pulling a page from the playbook from a couple decades ago," he said.

Ethanol, fermented from grain such as corn in a process similar to making moonshine, is required to be blended into gasoline under the Renewable Fuels Standard because it cuts the amounts of crude oil used to make motor fuel.

The E-15 blend may lead to accelerated engine wear and failure, fuel-system damage and false "check engine" lights when used for sustained periods, AAA said.

Heavy-duty vehicles, boats, motorcycles, power equipment, lawn mowers and off-road vehicles are prohibited from using E-15.

This report includes information from Bloomberg News.

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Down they go

Gas prices drop below \$3

BY MIKE KLEIN
 mklein@postbulletin.com

Gas prices have dropped below \$3 a gallon at some gas stations in southeastern Minnesota for the first time in nearly two years.

Several stations in Rochester and elsewhere in the region had gas at \$2.95 this morning, while others were just above \$3.

The average price in Rochester was \$3.06 on Thursday, down nearly a dime in a day, and 21 cents in a month. A year ago, the price was \$3.28. The last time the price was below \$3 was on Dec. 27, 2010, when it was \$2.99.

What's next? At the very worst, prices will plateau, and they may even decline a bit more, said Gail Weinholzer, spokesperson for AAA for Minnesota/Iowa.

"It's good news, and it will continue to be good news at least for the short term and into 2013," Weinholzer said.

Prices are falling because crude oil prices have stabilized, and demand is down because there's less auto travel in the winter, Weinholzer said. The hurricane season was relatively calm in the oil-producing Gulf of Mexico region, and refineries have switched to winter grades, which are cheaper to produce, she said.

For her part, Weinholzer is pleased to be answering questions about why gas prices are falling, rather than rising.

"It's amazing," she said, laughing. "I much prefer the why it's going down question to the 'What the heck is going on?'"

The steep fall in gas costs pushed down a measure of U.S. consumer prices last month, keeping inflation mild, a report released this morning said.

The seasonally adjusted consumer price index dropped 0.3 percent in November from October, the Labor Department said. Gas prices fell 7.4 percent, the steepest drop in nearly four years. That offset a 0.2 percent rise in food prices.

The national average sat at \$3.30 early Thursday, AAA reported. It's the lowest gas prices have been since early 2011, and the decline in price from October to November was the biggest drop nationally in three years.

Weinholzer said Minnesota's gas-price decline is even more dramatic than the national phenomenon because late-summer prices spiked because of pipeline problems in the Chicago area. The average price statewide has dropped 85 cents per gallon in 90 days.

Analysts caution that a drop off the "fiscal cliff" or additional unrest in the Midwest could send gas prices back up.

Prices

\$2.95: Price at some Rochester stations today

\$3.28: Average price one month ago in Rochester

\$3.18: Average price one year ago in Rochester



AAA calls for suspension of E15 to protect U.S. motorists

By Robert Pore

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AAA is urging regulators and the ethanol industry to stop the sale of E15 until motorists are better protected.

AAA, formerly the American Automobile Association, has found that consumers know very little about E15, and contends that less than 5 percent of cars on the road are approved by automakers to use the fuel.

The organization, which has more than 51 million members, came to that conclusion after a recent AAA survey found a "strong likelihood of consumer confusion and the potential for voided warranties and vehicle damage as a result of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) recent approval of E15 gasoline."

According to AAA, only about 12 million out of the more than 240 million light-duty vehicles on the roads today are approved by manufacturers to use E15 gasoline, based on a survey conducted by AAA of auto manufacturers. AAA automotive engineering experts also have reviewed the available research and believe that sustained use of E15 in both newer and older vehicles could result in significant problems such as accelerated engine wear and failure, fuel-system damage and false "check engine" lights for any vehicle not approved by its manufacturer to use E15.

"It is clear that millions of Americans are unfamiliar with E15, which means there is a strong possibility that many motorists may improperly fill up using this gas-

oline and damage their vehicle," said AAA President and CEO Robert Darbelnet. "Bringing E15 to the market without adequate safeguards does not responsibly meet the needs of consumers."

E15 in Nebraska

Recently, the Nebraska Corn Board announced that the first location in Nebraska to offer E15 at the fuel pump was at Uncle Neal's Country Convenience Store in Lexington.

Uncle Neal's was a recipient of a \$40,000 grant from the Nebraska Corn Board to establish four flex fuel pumps. The Lexington pumps dispense ordinary unleaded, E10, E15 and E85. This is the first location in Nebraska to offer E15, a fuel blend recently approved for use in all 2001 or newer gasoline-

powered passenger vehicles, including cars, pickups, vans and SUVs.

E85, with 85 percent ethanol and 15 percent ordinary gasoline, can only be used in Flex Fuel Vehicles (FFVs). One out of 10 Nebraskans drives an FFV.

Increased use of E15 would help Nebraska's bio-fuels industry, which has the capacity to produce more than 2.1 billion gallons of ethanol annually. Nebraska is the nation's second leading ethanol producer behind Iowa.

A recent University of Nebraska study showed that agriculture accounts for 44 percent of Nebraska's gross domestic product. Since passage of the Renewable Fuel Standard in 2006 by Congress — mandating that a certain percentage of the nation's

fuel supply come from alternative fuels, such as ethanol — it has allowed Nebraska's ethanol industry to grow to 25 plants. The state's ethanol industry is estimated be worth more than \$6 billion annually.

"Higher blends of ethanol such as E15 and E85 give consumers even more choice at the pump and help improve America's economy and energy security," said Kim Clark, director of biofuels development for the Nebraska Corn Board.

"As more flex fuel pumps that offer E15 become available across Nebraska and the nation, we expect to see a considerable increase in ethanol consumption — and that bodes well for Nebraska's ethanol industry, America's corn farmers and our nation as a whole," Clark added.

Warranties

But unsuspecting consumers using E15 could end up with engine problems that might not be covered by their vehicles' warranties, according to AAA. Five manufacturers — BMW, Chrysler, Nissan, Toyota and Volkswagen

— are on record saying their warranties will not cover fuel-related claims caused by the use of E15. Eight additional automakers — GM, Ford, Honda, Hyundai, Kia, Mazda, Mercedes-Benz and Volvo — have stated that the use of E15 does not comply with the fuel requirements specified in their owner's manuals and may void warranty coverage.

The only vehicles currently approved by automakers to use E15 are flex-fuel

models, 2001 model-year and newer Porsches, 2012 model-year and newer GM vehicles and 2013 model-year Ford vehicles.

These approvals extend only to cars, light-duty trucks and medium-duty passenger vehicles (SUVs). The use of E15 is expressly prohibited in heavy-duty vehicles, boats, motorcycles, power equipment, lawn mowers and off-road vehicles.

"The sale and use of E15 should be suspended until additional gas pump labeling and consumer education efforts are implemented to mitigate problems for motorists and their vehicles," said Darbelnet. "Consumers should carefully read pump labels and know their auto manufacturer's recommendations to help prevent any problems from E15."

Big Oil influence?

Bob Dinneen, president and CEO of the Renewable Fuels Association, said, "If AAA weren't so deep in the Big Oil politics, they would stop manufacturing concern about the efficacy of ethanol blend use and report enthusiastically about ethanol's consumer gasoline price savings."

Dinneen said AAA's antipathy toward ethanol is "well known and tired."

"But when put in contrast to gasoline quality issues AAA continues to ignore, one has to wonder whose interest they're truly trying to protect, consumers or oil companies?" he said.

With a struggling economy, Dinneen said, AAA should "support a domestic renewable fuel that reduced

wholesale gasoline prices by a national average of \$1.09 per gallon in 2011, according to an updated study authored by professors at the University of Wisconsin and Iowa State University. In the Midwest, savings were even greater at \$1.69 per gallon.”

AAA is urging fuel producers and regulators to do a better job of educating consumers about potential dangers before selling E15 gasoline, including a consumer education campaign and more effective pump labels, among other potential safeguards to protect consumers and their vehicles.

AAA also recommends additional testing to conclusively determine the impact of E15 use on vehicle engines and fuel system components. At least 10 gas stations currently sell E15 and that number is expected to grow, which means now is the time to suspend sales before more retailers begin offering the fuel, it says.

Accord-

ing to Dinneen, AAA’s “misplaced concern” that E15 should be further tested before being offered for



Bob Dinneen

sale “reflects a pathetic ignorance of EPA’s unprecedented test program before approving E15 for commercial use.”

“The fact is E15 has been the most aggressively and comprehensively tested fuel in the history of the agency (EPA),” he said. “The miles driven on E15 equate to 12 round trips to the moon and back without a single failure,

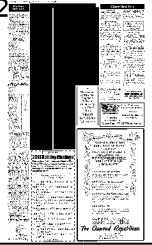
unless you want to count the deer that was killed on the test track. E15 is a safe fuel, as evidenced by the fact auto manufacturers are now providing warranty coverage for it.”

The EPA in June officially approved the sale of E15 after receiving a waiver request from producers interested in expanding the use of corn-based ethanol. EPA approved the use of E15 gasoline in flex-fuel vehicles and 2001 model year and newer cars, light-duty trucks and medium-duty passenger vehi-

cles and SUVs.

AAA urges consumers to follow the recommendations of manufacturers to truly protect themselves from voided warranties or potential damage.





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AAA: Winter weather calls for driver preparation

Snow and cold weather make driving conditions more difficult for motorists, especially during storms when icy conditions prevail. AAA Nebraska advises motorists to prepare themselves and their vehicles for dangerous road conditions.

“Motorists should allow extra time to get to their destination,” advises Rose White, public affairs director for AAA Nebraska. “Since speed is a factor in many crashes, never be in a hurry when road conditions are slick. Monitor weather conditions and follow the advice from authorities. If it is not safe to travel and you don’t need to venture out, don’t drive. Wait until the road conditions improve.”

If you must travel, motorists are encouraged to log on to www.511.Nebraska.gov. The 511 Traveler Information System provides information on highway surface conditions, closures and restrictions, AMBER Alerts, and site-specific weather forecasts. More than 225 Nebraska Department of Roads staff members and Nebraska State Patrol officers serve as field reporters to update the information around the clock. In addition, more than 100 highway cameras are used to provide travelers with live views of road conditions. Nebraska road condition information is also featured in a downloadable application for cell phone users at NDOR-TRAVELER.MOBI. Recorded message updates on Nebraska road conditions may be obtained by dialing 511 on a landline or cellular phone. When traveling outside of Nebraska, dial 1-800-906-9069 for updated information on our state’s road conditions.

AAA recommends that motorists keep emergency supplies in their vehicle, including a cell phone, boots, gloves, blanket, a “coffee can heater,” flashlight and reflective triangle.

“If you become stranded on a highway, it is best to stay with the vehicle. If you can start your

engine, run it for a few minutes at a time, just long enough to keep warm. Always clear snow away from the exhaust pipe area before you start the engine. A snow blocked exhaust pipe could cause deadly carbon monoxide gases to enter the passenger compartment,” warns White.

“If you see a stranded motorist and you are unable to render aid, dial *55 on your cell phone and provide the dispatcher with a description of the vehicle, number of passengers, if known, and details about the vehicle’s location, such as the nearest mile marker number or landmark,” she added.

Defensive Driving

AAA recommends the following tips for winter driving:

- Before starting out in snowy weather, remove the snow from the entire car so it doesn’t blow onto your windshield or the windshields of other drivers. Make sure your mirrors, lights, brake lights and turn signals are clean.

- To increase your visibility during the daylight hours, drive with your low-beam headlights illuminated.

- All passengers should be safely secured with their safety belts fastened. Any items that may become dangerous flying projectiles during a crash should be stored in the trunk.

- The driver’s hands should be properly positioned on the steering wheel, keeping in mind that during a crash, the steering column airbag may deploy. (Check your vehicle’s owner manual for proper hand positioning.)

- If you have teen drivers in your family, restrict their driving privileges until you have the opportunity to test their driving skills in an empty, snow packed or icy parking lot. They need to understand that vehicle’s operate differently when roads are slick or snow packed.

- Watch for icy surfaces on bridges and intersections, even when the rest of the road seems to

be in good condition.

- Always reduce your speed and increase your following distance when poor road or weather conditions prevail.

- Look farther ahead in traffic. Actions by other drivers will alert you to problems and give you extra seconds to react.

- When changing lanes, avoid cutting in front of trucks, which need more time and distance than passenger vehicles to stop. Hard braking may cause a vehicle to skid.

- Never use cruise control if the roads are wet, slick or snow packed.

- Remember that four-wheel drive helps you to get going quicker, but it won’t help you stop any faster.

- If your vehicle is equipped with anti-lock brakes, apply constant, firm pressure to the pedal when stopping. You may feel or hear a thumping sound when the system is engaged.

Proper Preparation

Motorists can help keep their vehicles on the road by doing the following:

- Check your battery strength. Faulty batteries cause more car starting problems than any other factor. At 0 degrees, a good battery has 35 percent less starting power. Many automotive facilities can quickly check your battery’s power using a hand-held computer.

- Park your car in the garage. If you have no garage, put a tarp over the hood or park protected from prevailing winds. To keep doors from freezing shut, place a plastic trash bag between the door and the frame.

- Keep the fuel tank at least half-full to avoid fuel-line freeze-up.

Emergency Road Kit

Each vehicle in your family should be equipped with a winter emergency road kit that contains the following:

- Plastic container of abrasive material such as sand or salt. (Use an empty plastic ice cream bucket

to store your sand.)

- Small snow shovel and ice scraper

- Flashlight with extra batteries
- Winter grade windshield washer solvent

- Empty coffee can filled with candles and matches (mini-furnace)

- Mobile phone, pre-programmed with rescue apps and important phone numbers including family members and emergency services

- First-aid kit
- Non-perishable snacks

- Blankets, thermal sleeping bag, boots, heavy socks, gloves, hat, and scarves

- Jumper cable with safety goggles

- Warning devices (flares or triangles)

- Basic toolkit (screwdrivers, pliers, adjustable wrench)

- Large plastic trash bags, newspapers (use as insulation between layers of clothing)

- Red scarf or flag, or folding windshield sun visor that indicates Call Police

Phone Applications

Android and iPhone users can download AAA Mobile, AAA’s mobile smartphone app that provides AAA services for all motorists, such as mapping and gas price comparisons, as well as member-exclusive benefits including roadside assistance. AAA Membership is not required to download and use AAA apps, but is necessary to take advantage of unique member benefits such as roadside assistance. For more information on AAA Mobile, visit AAA.com/Mobile.

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Simulator for students

Program has many scenarios for behind the wheel experience

By **ANDREA JOHNSON**
Staff Writer
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Quentin Burdick Job Corps Center students are getting some behind the wheel experience this week without actually having to get behind the wheel.

"The only thing it doesn't do is give you the feel of a real car," said Trey Sartwell, 19, from Parshall, one of the students who has been practicing with a driving simulator on loan from the AAA Keys2 Drive program.

Renee Escherich, student government coordinator, said the use of the driving simulator is free. Escherich contacted the AAA office in Fargo and arranged to pick up the simulator in Bismarck. She said it was easy to hook up. Schools all over North Dakota have used it in driver education programs but the Job Corps has had the use of it a bit longer than usual. So far about 35 students, all of whom have

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Andrea Johnson/MDN

Quentin Burdick Job Corps Center student **Jessica Byrd-Farr**, 23, uses a driver simulator that mimics what it would be like to be texting and driving.





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Quentin Burdick Job Corps Center student **Maurice Lige Jr.**, 18, uses a driver simulator on Tuesday.

Andrea Johnson/NDN





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Driving

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recently gotten their learner's permits and are in need of behind the wheel practice, have tried out the simulator.

Escherich said the Job Corps students would normally take behind the wheel instruction through the Minot Public Schools, using the school district's car, but a car accident last month put that car out of commission for a few weeks. The driver simulator is a good substitute in the meantime.

The driver simulator gives students driving practice in a city setting, in the suburbs and on the freeway. It also has a program that lets them see what it would be like to drive while impaired or dis-

tracted by text-messaging. During the drunk driving scenario, if a student loses control and crashes, the screen goes red and the student is taken through what happens next: being stopped by the police, being placed under arrest, being taken to jail and going through booking, going before the judge for sentencing and then losing out on a job opportunity when he has the DUI on his record.

Some scenarios end with the driver being injured and being air-lifted to a hospital in a helicopter. The simulation makes the helicopter or the jail setting feel quite real.

Escherich and test administrator Diana Shackelford said they think the simulation makes some of the students think hard about what could happen if they text a

friend while they're behind the wheel or drive drunk. Some Job Corps students have already had some difficulties with the court system and don't want to go back, while the simulation makes others see just how costly a DUI conviction could be in terms of fines, insurance costs and the length of time the conviction remains on their record.

Some of the students have been driving since they were quite young but have never had a license. Even students who know how to drive have to learn some of the differences in the rules of the road between North Dakota and other states.

Jessica Byrd-Farr, 23, who has had a license before but doesn't hold a North Dakota license, said the speed limit





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on highways are different in North Dakota compared with some of the other places she's lived. Big city driving requires drivers to be fast but cautious, she said. Some of the students said they haven't driven on snowy roads yet. Icy roads in North Dakota are a bit different from the wet slush that students might be used to in other states.

Students said practicing with the simulator will make them better drivers when they do get behind the wheel, since they've had a chance to make their mistakes with the simulator.

Escherich and Shackelford said they will have to give the simulator back soon but they would like to borrow it again and have it at the center a few times each year.

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Winter puts demands on N.D. drivers

By BEN RODGERS
THE JAMESTOWN SUN

As the holidays approach, thousands of North Dakotans will take to the highways and interstates to travel to be with friends and family this season. Officials across the state urge motorists take caution to prevent any tragedies that could occur.

Although specific numbers for the state aren't available, the North Dakota AAA estimates in a seven-state region that includes North Dakota that one in every three people will travel for the holidays.

Nationwide the number comes to 93 million who will take to the roads, of which, 1.2 million are expected to get stranded or broken down this holiday season.

"Much of that can be avoided by making sure your vehicle is properly prepared for the trip," said Gene LaDoucer, North Dakota AAA spokesman.

A number of simple checks can be performed to make sure a vehicle can handle the cold-weather trip.

Those include being full on washer fluid and a proper mixture of coolant and water, having windshield wipers in good shape, riding properly inflated tires with good tread, a properly charged battery and all belts and hoses are checked.

A winter-readiness check can be conducted by most mechanics for little or no cost with an appointment. The checks are simple enough for someone with basic



John M. Steiner / The Sun

A winter survival kit for an automobile should include such items as blankets, water, packaged food, a safety kit and a cellular phone.

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SNOW: Quick accumulations cause trouble

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automotive knowledge.

But problems often come from the driver, not the vehicle, LaDoucer said.

"The most important thing is to drive for the conditions," he said. "Allow yourself plenty of time to get to your destination so you're not rushing."

Another important tip for drivers and passengers is to always buckle up and never drink and drive, he said.

The biggest weather concern however, won't be snow but will be an arctic intrusion bringing blustery temperatures into the area, said Tony Merriman, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Bismarck.

"It looks like Christmas Eve and Christmas Day we got slight chances of snow, but the main story is really going to be how cold it's going to be," Merriman said.

It could be difficult for highs to break 10 degrees on Monday and Tuesday, he said.

John Wheeler, WDAY, chief meteorologist, agreed with flurries over this weekend into Christmas, but said it's hard to predict snow totals so many days out.

Wheeler said more accidents

occur when there is a quick accumulation — like Jamestown on Tuesday — versus a big blizzard.

"Conditions like that, there's not even any talk of closing roads. But the fact is they become very unsafe because you have a lot of traffic trying to drive full highway speed," he said.

But no major events are forecasted to hit the area around Christmas.

"With any luck those little waves will miss us and we'll just have some pretty flurries and it won't affect traffic at all, that's possible," Wheeler said.

Wheeler said WDAY has multiple video updates a day on www.wday.com then clicking on weather. But he said the North Dakota Department of Transportation has the most up to date information on road conditions.

"We just like to tell them to know before you go," said Brandon Beise, operations engineer in the maintenance division of the NDDOT. "The more information you have the better decision you can make."

At www.dot.nd.gov and under travel information map travelers can view specific conditions on the state's major roads. Travel information is also available by calling 511





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from any phone.

Even with information available Beise said the most important thing when driving in winter is driving for the conditions, this includes not using the cruise control.

"The black ice can sneak up even if the road is sanded and you have good traction," he said.

Beise and LaDoucer recommended motorists have a winter driving kit packed in their vehicles in case they do become stranded.

Essentials include blankets, warm clothing, water, a first aid kit, a heat source, cell phone, sand for traction, a small shovel, and non-perishable food items.

It's also important not to run the car nonstop if stranded — just enough to stay warm. Also the exhaust pipe should be checked to make sure it is clear so poisonous gases aren't directed back into the vehicle, where they could harm the passengers.

And if stranded, stay put. Don't venture out looking for help.

"It's easier to find individuals if they are with their vehicle, especially in extreme situations," LaDoucer said.

Sun reporter Ben Rodgers can be reached at 701-952-8455 or by email at brodgers@jamestownsun.com



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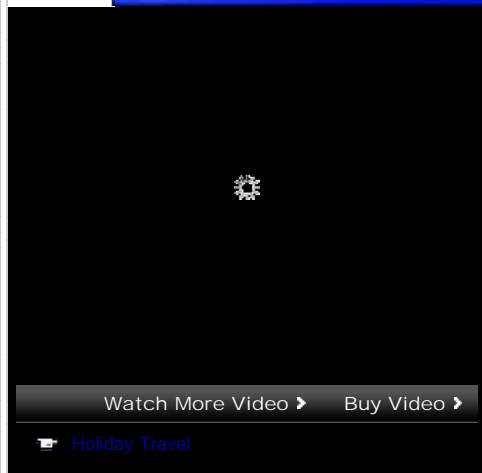
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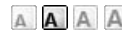
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That's right, the time for year-end holiday travel is here, and that means millions are already heading out to visit family and friends.

Whether it's wanting to kick off the new year with a vacation, or the lure of unwrapping presents with family, you might be surprised at the increase in the number of people taking to the roads, and the skies, this Christmas season.

1.5 million more Americans are heading home for the holidays

in 2012 than in 2011.

Natalie Rice, with Triple A, says there's an increase in both road and air travel.

"We're projecting an increase as compared to last year. We're looking at probably 93 million travelers projected for the holiday season this year," says Rice.

In Tennessee alone, 2 million people will be hitting the road.

"A lot of the travel will be holiday travel, people visiting family and friends, so that's the majority of it," Rice says.

An estimated 5.6 million Americans will travel by air...

And according to Triple A, out of all travel holidays

the year end holiday season remains the least effected by factors like high gas prices and economic conditions.

"We're projecting people will travel at least 50 miles or more during their journey away from home during the holiday season," says Rice.

But as millions get behind the wheel, some drivers, like Janice McGaffick, say they take extra safety precautions during the holiday travel period.

"Be alert, pay attention to what's going on around you, and don't speed," McGaffick says.

In fact, ninety percent of travel is by automobile.

That's nearly 27 percent of the US population.

So Triple A encourages traveling safely, too...even during what the holiday rush.

Rice says "With so many people out traveling and looking forward to spending time with the holidays with their families and their friends we do want people to be a little more cautious and be a little more careful with driving."



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AAA's 'Tow to Go' a holiday 'Plan Z' option for impaired drivers

Posted December 20, 2012 at 5 a.m.

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Have you seen the stats on the TDOT SmartWay interstate message boards, showing the number of fatalities on roadways this year compared to 2011?

According to Don Lindsey, AAA Tennessee's director of public affairs, the majority of these deaths are entirely preventable.

"In 2011, almost three in every 10 drivers killed on Tennessee roads were involved in some way with a driver with at least a .08 blood alcohol concentration," Lindsey said. "If you take that same percentage of drivers killed in 2012 and subtract them out, we would have the lowest number of fatalities since before 1950."

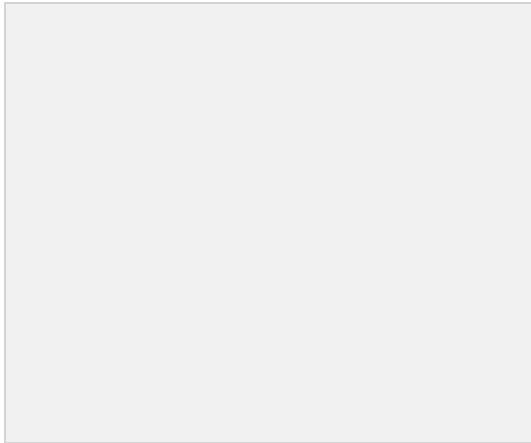
AAA is partnering with Anheuser-Busch, Eagle Distributing and the Metropolitan Drug Commission to provide drivers with a safe option to getting home without driving under the influence from Dec. 21 to Jan. 1.

"Tow to Go" is designed to encourage individuals to think about and make plans to get home safely — through a designated driver or taxi.

But should your plans fall through at the last minute, don't drive. Instead, call 1-800-234-1222 to set up a tow truck to take you and your vehicle to a safe location within a 10-mile radius for free.

"'Tow to Go' is not plan A, it's plan Z," Lindsey said. "It's the last resort, and it's dependent on the availability and trucks of service technicians to get you where you need to be. It is something that is there should the worst happen."

Staff writer Steven Harris



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New gas could damage older cars

AAA says drivers should be educated on 15% ethanol fuel

By RICK BARRETT
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A national survey from the motorist group AAA shows that most consumers haven't heard of the new 15% blend of ethanol in gasoline that's coming to the marketplace and could cause engine damage if used in the wrong vehicles.

The telephone survey found that 95% of 1,012 adults were unaware of the E15 fuel that's been approved by the Environmental Protection Agency for use in 2001 and newer vehicles but should not be used in older vehicles.

Automakers BMW, Chrysler, Nissan, Toyota and Volkswagen have said their warranties will not cover fuel-related claims caused by the use of E15, according to AAA.

Automakers Ford, Honda, Hyundai, Kia, Mazda, Mercedes-Benz and Volvo have said the use of E15 doesn't comply with their fuel requirements and may void warranty coverage, AAA noted.

From the survey results: "It is clear that millions of Americans are unfamiliar with E15, which means there is a strong possibility that many motorists may improperly fill up using this gasoline and damage their vehicle," Kevin Bakewell, AAA chief pub-

lic affairs officer said in a news release.

The risks of using E15 have been exaggerated, according to the American Coalition for Ethanol, noting that the fuel blend has undergone three years and six million miles of testing by the Environmental Protection Agency.

"AAA has always had a bias against ethanol," Ron Lamberty, coalition vice president, said in a written statement.

Recently, a handful of service stations nationwide began offering E15, and more are expected to offer the higher blend of the additive in their fuel as it becomes available.

Wisconsin ranks seventh among ethanol-producing states, and the fuel additive, which is made from corn, is an important source of income for farmers.

Advocates say raising the amount of ethanol in gasoline from the current 10% blend to 15% reduces the nation's dependence on foreign oil, lowers the price of fuel and is good for the environment.

Critics say the 15% blend could cause engine failure in older vehicles. They also say it could lower gas mileage and void warranties of air-cooled engines used in outdoor power equipment and

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motorcycles.

AAA says it's not opposed to E15, but it believes there should be more public education.

The group wants strong labeling on gasoline pumps to keep motorists from mistakenly choosing the wrong fuel.

"People are going to be attracted to E15 because it's cheaper. But using the wrong fuel could result in some costly damage," said [AAA Wisconsin](#) spokeswoman Pam Moen.

E15 is not yet available in Wisconsin, according to AAA.

