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A FAMILIAR PATTERN: FATHER KILLS CHILDREN, WIFE, INJURES 5 IN HOLIDAY DUI CRASH

ALTADENA, CA (July 7, 2009) – A horrific crash over the 4 July holiday weekend that killed two children and their mother and injured five others has a familiar ring about it to safety experts — DUI parents killing their own children.

Isis Zepeda, 5, Eduardo Munoz, 7, and their mother were killed on Highway 43 when their father crashed into a Ford F250 pulling an RV trailer which contained a family returning from a 4th of July holiday weekend. Five people, including three children, were injured in the Ford. Pedro Munoz was arrested for felony DUI and three counts of vehicular manslaughter. CHP officers had just spotted Munoz weaving through traffic at 83 miles per hour when the crash occurred. Munoz was previously charged with DUI in 2007 but the charges were reduced to reckless driving. He was on parole when the crash happened.

The pattern is all too familiar to Stephanie Tombrello, Executive Director of SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. “Almost 400 kids die on our roads each year in DUI-involved crashes, and many more are injured. Twenty-five percent of the crashes that kill children involve alcohol. Most of these kids aren’t placed at risk by a stranger but by the person driving **their** vehicle.”

The trauma suffered by vulnerable children makes Tombrello angry. “This is a tragedy for all involved, but unlike the adults, these children had no say about whether or not they got in the car with an impaired driver late last night. Too many kids are killed or injured by the actions of people who should protect them. Most of these deaths and injuries are preventable — as in this case, in most DUI crashes where a child dies, the driver survives. Unfortunately, these kids

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are especially vulnerable because they are often not buckled up, making it much more likely that they will be killed or seriously hurt.”

The crash came during the California Highway Patrol Maximum Enforcement Period which began at 6 p.m. Friday July 3 and extended until midnight on Sunday, July 5. CHP made 454 DUI arrests statewide during the Maximum Enforcement Period, up from 342 last year. A total of five people appeared to have been killed in DUI-related crashes during the weekend. The previous Maximum Enforcement Period, over Memorial Day weekend, also saw an horrific DUI-related family collision when three-year-old twins from the Oakland area were killed along with their mother, uncle and unborn sibling. The mother’s domestic partner was arrested and charged with vehicular manslaughter in that case.

Supported by a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety, through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. is campaigning to reduce the number of children involved in DUI-related incidents. SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. recommends that the media highlight this little-known risk to children, so that parents, policy makers, and enforcement agencies are made more aware of the severity of the risk of impaired driving to children.

Tombrello’s message is unequivocal. “Driving while under the influence with a child in the car, or allowing your child to be driven by an impaired driver, is child abuse. We should treat it as such.”