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Students advised to use caution for holiday travel

■ THE WEEK'S RISKIEST TRAVEL TIME IS FROM NOON TO 11 P.M. TODAY.

By HILARY LEHMAN

Alligator Writer
hlehman@alligator.org

With 26 student deaths since January, including several caused by traffic accidents, law enforcement officials are advising students to be careful on the roads this weekend.

Officials said students should take precautions for their safety, such as wearing seat belts, reducing driving distractions and avoiding dangerous traffic situations because of the extra traffic from Thanksgiving and the

football game.

Lt. Mike Burroughs, Florida Highway Patrol spokesman for the Gainesville area, said the most dangerous and congested travel time is from noon to 11 p.m. today.

"For those travelers who are going to be traveling out of town, if they could delay their trip to start early Thursday morning, they would find a much safer trip and much less congested roadways," he said.

Officer Darin Gentry of the University Police Department said students should also avoid waiting until the last minute to return to Gainesville for the same reasons.

Burroughs said the main interstates are usually the most dangerous for driving during the holiday weekend. However, the busy

shopping weekend and the big football game make any roads dangerous, he said.

Taking obvious precautions like wearing seat belts, driving sober and avoiding text messages and other distractions are essential to student safety, he said.

Around Gainesville

Burroughs said adding distracted, fatigued drivers to the heavy congestion of the roadways makes for a "deadly situation."

Gentry echoed the importance of students staying alert while driving by getting enough sleep and avoiding alcohol.

He said with the football game this weekend, students need to watch out for other people driving drunk.

Drivers should be especially careful between 10 p.m. and 3 a.m., which is the most common time for alcohol-related accidents, he said.

FHP encourages drivers to call the 511 system if they are stuck in gridlock on the road. The system gives live updates on road blockages and alternate routes.

Burroughs said with the high number of law enforcement officers patrolling the roadways this weekend, it is important for students to be aware of the Move Over Act.

When drivers see an officer on the side of the road, they need to slow down to 20 mph below the speed limit on a two-lane road or move to the lane farther from the roadside if driving on the interstate.