



NEWS

For Immediate Release

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Press Conference at 1:00 p.m. on December 3, 2012 for the Harris County DWI Court's Observance of "National Impaired Driving Prevention Month"

Houston, Texas —In recognition of *National Impaired Driving Prevention Month*, the **Harris County SOBER Courts** will hold a press conference in conjunction with their next commencement ceremony **at 1:00 p.m. on DECEMBER 3, 2012** in the Ceremonial Courtroom of the Harris County Criminal Justice Center (1201 Franklin – 20th Floor). Please join **Judge Diane Bull, Judge Robin Brown, and Judge Natalie Fleming** for this press conference. *Helen Harberts*, a nationally known expert in Drug/DWI Court programs and currently the Chief Probation Officer for the Harris County Community Supervision and Corrections Department will deliver the commencement address.

December is designated as *National Impaired Driving Prevention Month*, a time to raise awareness about the consequences of driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs. This year, DWI Courts throughout the nation are recognizing *National Impaired Driving Prevention Month* by highlighting their unparalleled success at reducing repeat drunk driving, saving money, and making the community safer. The uplifting commencement ceremony is evidence of the tremendous impact that the **Harris County SOBER Court** program has had on the community, and this event will send a powerful message that DWI Courts are proven to save lives and reduce costs.

Like the other 600 operational DWI Courts in the United States, the **Harris County SOBER Court** is a judicially-supervised court docket that reduces correctional costs, protects community safety, and improves public welfare. In DWI Courts, seriously alcohol-or-drug addicted individuals remain in treatment for long periods of time while under close supervision.

More than ten men and women are expected to be among the December graduates. The ceremony marks their completion of an intensive program of comprehensive alcohol treatment, close supervision, and full accountability.

SOBER Court participants must meet their obligation to themselves, their families, and society. To ensure accountability, they are regularly and randomly tested for alcohol and drug use, required to appear frequently in court for the judge to review their progress, rewarded for doing well, and sanctioned for not living up to their obligations. Research continues to show that DWI Courts are more effective than jail or prison and likewise more effective than treatment with accountability.



SOBER Court: a DWI Court Program for the Harris County Criminal Courts at Law

The goal of the **Harris County SOBER Court** program is to increase public safety and to reduce long-term costs to the criminal justice system and the community through intense supervision utilizing a multi-disciplinary, team effort. This program is a collaborative effort involving the Harris County Criminal Courts at Law, the District Attorney's Office, local defense attorneys, the Community Supervision and Corrections Department, the Harris County Sheriff's Department and other treatment providers and social services agencies in Harris County.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), drivers are considered to be impaired when their Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) reaches .08 or higher. Thus, any fatal crash involving a driver with a BAC of .08 or higher is considered to be an alcohol-impaired-driving crash.

Facts about Alcohol Impaired Driving from the National Center for DWI Courts:

- Alcohol-impaired driving is one of the most-frequently-committed and deadliest crimes.
- In 2010, 32,885 people nationwide were killed in motor vehicle crashes.
- Repeat DWI offenders are over represented in fatal crashes, and they pose a greater risk of being responsible for a motor vehicle crash that kills another person.
- Drivers with a BAC of .15 and above are at least 20 times more likely to be involved in a fatal crash than a non-drinking driver.
- NHTSA estimates that half of all of the drivers arrested and half of those convicted of DWI have a BAC of .15 or greater.
- A driver with a .08 BAC in a fatal crash is 8 times more likely to have had a prior DWI Conviction than a person with no alcohol present.

Facts about Alcohol Impaired Driving from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration:

- In 2010, there were 10,228 fatalities in crashes involving a driver with a BAC of .08 or higher. Alcohol-impaired drivers were responsible for 31% of the total traffic fatalities during the year.
- In 2010, 30% of the drivers involved in fatal motor vehicle crashes in Texas had a BAC of .08 or higher.
- The rate of alcohol impairment among drivers involved in fatal crashes in 2010 was four times higher at night than during the day.

In observance of *National Impaired Driving Prevention Month*, a press conference will be held immediately prior to the **Harris County SOBER Court's** December commencement ceremony. Please join **Judge Diane Bull, Judge Robin Brown, and Judge Natalie Fleming** for this press conference and

graduation. *Helen Harberts*, a nationally known expert in Drug/DWI Court programs and currently the Chief Probation Officer for the Harris County Community Supervision and Corrections Department, will deliver the commencement address.

SOBER Court Mission Statement

SOBER Court is designed to increase public safety and reduce long-term costs to the criminal justice system and the community through intense supervision utilizing a multi-disciplinary, team effort. The goal is to break the cycle of addiction and reduce repeat DWI offenses with treatment and rehabilitation of participants through a process of accountability, frequent drug testing, education, substance abuse treatment, sanctions and incentives designed to promote long-term sobriety, accountability, and productive lifestyles.

SOBER Court Goals

1. Promote and enforce abstinence
2. Reduce recidivism rates
3. Hold alcohol/drug-dependent offenders accountable for their criminal conduct
4. Provide real and effective rehabilitation for criminal offenders