



THE LEL

Law Enforcement Improving Traffic Safety

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Law Enforcement Phlebotomy for Safer Roads

The Arizona Forensic Phlebotomy Program directly benefits the efforts to reduce impaired driving and save lives.

By Alberto Gutier

THE TRAGEDY AND CHAOS CAUSED BY DRUG AND alcohol impaired drivers on our roads and highways continue to shape and impact the efforts of policing and highway safety organizations across the United States. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, state and territorial highway safety offices, public safety agencies and stakeholder groups all strive to develop ever more effective

strategies and tools to protect innocent lives and limit the enormous costs to the community. The strategies and tools are primarily centered on maximizing the deterrent effects of enforcement, educating the community, use of intervention and diversion programs and use of administrative license revocation and suspension laws. The Arizona Governor's Office of Highway Safety (GOHS) works with many partner and stakeholder groups in an effort to constantly innovate and identify

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ways to save lives and improve current tools and methodologies.

In 1995, two Arizona Department of Public Safety Highway Patrol sergeants attended the clinical laboratory phlebotomy training program at Phoenix College. Subsequently, small numbers of additional Arizona police officers, deputies and troopers attended the training and conducted enforcement draws at sobriety checkpoints, DUI task force events and for routine enforcement activities. In 2000, the GOHS initiated a formal partnership with Phoenix College; this was later expanded to include other community college districts and now also includes Pima Medical Institute. Since the inception of the statewide training program under the guidance and direction of GOHS, more than 1,200 forensic phlebotomists have been trained and qualified. Arizona currently has over 450 trained and active forensic phlebotomists throughout the state, with phlebotomists in each county, each Highway Patrol district and in the vast majority of municipalities. The state has constant phlebotomist coverage through a combination of agency and GOHS funding.

Arizona has a DUI test refusal rate of approximately five percent, and this extremely low refusal rate is attributed primarily to GOHS efforts to establish and maintain a comprehensive forensic phlebotomy program,

and support and funding for telephonic and tele-facsimile warrant systems. Additionally, GOHS recently partnered with the Maricopa County Superior Court and the Phoenix Police Department to build and support an e-warrant submittal system. The new system provides thousands of officers the ability to submit a search warrant for blood from the laptop in their patrol vehicle, print it on their in-car printers and complete the entire warrant procurement process in minutes. The Arizona Supreme Court has asked the GOHS to provide funding to expand this program statewide.

The Arizona Forensic Phlebotomy Program is built to ensure compliance with national clinical guidelines and best practices. Strict program oversight is accomplished through the direction of GOHS and formally designated agency coordinators. Forensic phlebotomists must complete rigorous initial training and mandatory continuing education. Significant effort and focus are given to eliminating variance in the program through standardized and systematic instruction and oversight.

The Arizona Forensic Phlebotomy Program directly benefits the efforts to reduce impaired driving and save lives. Evidence is obtained more rapidly, warrants are quickly executed, chain-of-custody issues are eliminated and the best evidence is obtained for court. This results in a stronger deterrent, more effective enforcement, better evidentiary support complementing the Drug Recognition Expert (DRE) and Advanced Roadside Impaired Driver Enforcement (ARIDE) programs, and stronger cases for court. The GOHS has, and will continue to, work with other states in exploring and developing forensic phlebotomy programs and electronic search warrant processes to benefit our fight against impaired driving.

Alberto Gutier is the Governor's Highway Safety Representative for the state of Arizona.

