Drunken driving deaths down, Troop A reports

Drunken drivers have killed fewer people in the State Police Troop A area during the first nine months of 1983; as compared to the same period in 1982, records show.

In addition, there has been a 15 percent reduction in total traffic deaths in the eight-parish Troop A area during the same period.

Police believe the main reason for the reduction is the institution of tougher drunken driving laws, said Troop A spokesman Mike Edmonson.

From January through September 1982, 64 traffic deaths were reported by Troop A, compared to 51 during the same period this year, Edmonson said Wednesday.

Edmonson said 70 percent of the fatal auto accidents from January to September 1982 were alcohol related, while only 50 percent of the fatalities during the same period this year involved drunken drivers.

Edmonson said one reason for the decline in DWI-related deaths is the 2 a.m. curfew on selling alcohol in several areas of the Troop A region.

Many of the people who used to stay out all night drinking “are now going home,” Edmonson said. Before 1982, many automobile accidents occurred between midnight and 6 a.m., he said.

While alcohol-related traffic deaths have decreased, Troop A showed a negligible reduction in DWI arrests.

During the first nine months of 1982 there were 1,451 DWI arrests, Edmonson said. Through the first nine months of 1983 there were 1,444 DWI arrests, he said.

Under the new DWI law, which went into effect Jan. 1, first-offenders can be jailed and fined from $125-$500. They also can be required to attend a substance abuse and driver education program.

A second offense carries a fine of between $300-$500 and a jail sentence of 30 days to six months. The judge may reduce the jail term to 15 days and order participation in a substance abuse and driver education program or 30 eight-hour days of court-approved community service and participation in the programs.

The third offense carries a jail sentence of one to five years, but with the stipulation that at least six months be served without benefit of parole, probation or suspension of sentence.

Edmonson also said that during September, Troop A made 172 DWI arrests.

Troop A investigated 322 accidents, in which 209 persons were injured and four died. He said 3,463 traffic citations were issued.

The eight-parish area covered by Troop A includes East and West Baton Rouge, East and West Feliciana, Ascension, Iberville, St. James and Livingston parishes.