Louisiana Now Joins Other States

Louisiana has now joined several other states in enacting a law aimed at reducing carnage on the highways by providing stiff penalties for drunk drivers.

The law signed Tuesday by Gov. Dave Treen will not become effective until Jan. 1. The Legislature deliberately delayed the effective date of the law to give the Department of Public Safety time to educate the driving public on the tough new law and the penalties which a driver faces if he or she pleads guilty or is found guilty of drunken driving.

Because so many fatal accidents involve drivers who have been drinking, the general public has been in favor of stiffer penalties.

The only serious opposition to the tough law came mainly from district attorneys who were opposed to filing written reasons for dismissing or reducing charges and from judges who objected to the Legislature removing their discretion in imposing sentences.

Election to a judgeship doesn't give anyone infallible judgment. Judges have handed down suspended or probated sentences on drunken drivers on the strength of their belief that a person has learned a lesson, only to find the person returning to court at a later date on the same charge. And sometimes, judges see that same person facing additional charges because a death resulted when the same individual was driving intoxicated.

Removing judges' discretion will cause drivers to give more consideration to the consequences of operating a vehicle while intoxicated.

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