New panel to review DWT law enforcement system

By MIKE DUNNE
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Mayor Scen has formed a task force on drunk driving and charged it with reviewing the system of apprehension, conviction and probation. The mayor said he wants the task force to recommend improvements to what he says is already a good system.

"By every yardstick of comparison we have... Baton Rouge has an excellent program in combating the drunk driver... But we're not 100 percent successful... and that is the goal," he said.

Saying the city was one of 10 in the nation recently awarded $50,000 in federal funds to study its anti-drinking-driver program, the mayor said the task force would dovetail with the study. The $50,000 would be used to pay for a staff person to compile and disseminate information to the public, the mayor said.

Screen said he hoped the Baton Rouge program would be a "model to the nation."

The task force will also make a suggestion on the $200,000 the state has given the city to operate a seven-day drunk driving apprehension program expanded from three days a week beginning Nov. 1 through 1984, the mayor said.

The committee will forward its recommendations to the mayor, Metro Council, Legislature and police agencies in the parish.

Dr. Harold Brandt, president of the local Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, said one of the things he hoped the task force would look at is the use of a state act that allows driving while intoxicated convictions to be removed from the record for insurance purposes but is also being used to remove convictions for second and third offenses.

Councilman Ben Peabody said he would also soon send the the council a proposal to make it illegal to have any open container of alcohol in a motor vehicle.

City Court Clerk Mickey Skyring said Baton Rouge City Court has one of the highest conviction rates in the nation. He said 99 percent of all those charged with DWI are found guilty. That compares with about 26 percent conviction rate in Orleans Parish, he said.

Police Chief Pat Bonanno said since April of this year, city police have arrested an average 144 persons per month on DWI - roughly 25 percent above last year's arrest rate. Police had a "tremendous" month in September, arresting 172 DWI suspects, he said.

Two years ago, Louisiana had the third highest ratio of fatalities involving drunken drivers, but by last year it was third on the list of states reducing alcohol-related highway deaths, Brandt said. Those fatalities have begun to climb back up, however, he said.

Joining Peabody, Skyring, Brandt and Bonanno on the task force will be Bob Shortess of the Sheriff's Office, City Court Judge Darrel White, District Judge Doug Moreau, a member of the parish attorney's staff, a member of the district attorney's staff, Bill Noonan of the School Board's, alcohol and drug abuse prevention program, Mrs. Thais Johnson of the Catholic school system, Harold Bolling of the Chamber of Commerce, Bobby Smith of the Trades and Labor Council, State Sen. Ken Osterberger, Olin Dart of the Safety Council and B.J. Daly of the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Council.