

Checkpoints check 'em off the checklist

[Food & Diet](#), [Alcohol](#)



Checkpoints — Check ' Em Off the Checklist To the San Luis Obispo Police Department: The Pack family was one that was very well regarded throughout the Danville community. Parents Bob and Carmen had two little children, ten year old Troy and his seven year old sister Alana, both of which attended Sycamore Valley Elementary School with my brother and me. Troy was a pretty big kid, and even though he was a grade below us, I remember my friends and I would always try to pick him on our football team. My mom knew Carmen very well from PTA, and we had even been over to their family's for dinner once before. But on the fateful night of October 26th, 2003, the lives of the members of the Pack family, as well as many other people in their community would change forever. The Pack family had just finished eating dinner on what seemed to be just another ordinary Sunday night. Troy and Alana had a big day at school the next day, and they were anxiously awaiting their father's return home from work. Their mom decided she was going to treat her kids to some dessert before bed. The family decided to take a walk down the street to the local Arco station to get some slurpees. In the middle of their walk back home - the unexpected happened. A gold Mercedes, being driven by a woman who was later discovered to be Jimena Baretto, veered across two lanes of traffic and off the road. The car then drove 80 feet down the sidewalk before striking the family from behind. Baretto fled the scene on foot, and wasn't captured by police until three days later - but the damage had been done. Alana was killed instantly upon impact, and although Troy was rushed to a local hospital, he died there later that night. In merely a few hours, loving parents Bob and Carmen had the two most important things in their lives taken away from them. It was later

discovered that Baretto had been driving with a Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) well above the legal limit. She had had four Driving Under the Influences (DUIs) on her record already, and she had been driving without a license, which had previously been suspended for the 9th time. Unfortunately stories like this are not uncommon in California. Drunk driving has been a problem throughout the entire nation for decades now, and as cars are only becoming bigger and faster, these incidences are getting more and more dangerous. In 2007 alone, 3, 967 people in California were killed in traffic accidents. 1, 489 of these fatalities (38 percent) were a result of alcohol. An additional 30, 783 people were injured from alcohol-involved crashes in California that same year (Driving Under). In 2005, 19 people were killed due to alcohol related traffic accidents in San Luis Obispo County alone (City-Data). It is clear that the lone use of a simple law prohibiting driving under the influence has not been effective enough in preventing our citizens from doing so. Something more needs to be done, or these casualty numbers will continue to increase as they have been over the past decade. I propose that the San Luis Obispo Police Department set up a series of DUI checkpoints throughout the city, in order to minimize the frequency of these tragic instances, and establish safer roadways for the people of San Luis Obispo to use. A DUI checkpoint entails police officers stopping every vehicle that passes through a predetermined intersection to examine drivers for signs of impairment. The intersection is chosen well beforehand, and is usually one that is particularly busy, or has a history of frequent traffic accidents. These checkpoints help raise public awareness about the dangers of driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, as well as issue DUI arrests or other citations when

applicable. They are typically scheduled for a time when people are more likely to drink and drive, such as weekends or holidays. Although the number of DUIs given in relation to the number of vehicles that pass through these checkpoints is usually only around one percent (Gruenewald), they are still effective in taking a drunk drivers off the road, and out of a position where they could hurt someone else or themselves. Every drunk driver on the road is a significant threat to the rest of those sharing the streets with him/her. Despite the legitimate danger to others that drivers under the influence cause, as well as the drivers that are taken off the road because of these checkpoints, there are still those that oppose the use of them to enforce driving laws. Some would argue that the success rate of these checkpoints isn't high enough to outweigh the cost of operating them. Escondido Police Lieutenant Tom Allen stated that " A checkpoint costs about \$13, 000 [per 8 hour operating night]", (Escondido). With an average DUI arrest rate of around one percent, many feel that the amount of money it takes to run these checkpoints is too high for such a small percentage. Some of those opposed to the use of sobriety checkpoints have also claimed that they are unconstitutional, citing the Fourth Amendment, which protects American citizens from unreasonable search and seizure. They claim that the questioning and examination of drivers without probable cause is unconstitutional. Both arguments are reasonable, but both can also be promptly proved invalid. Yes, these checkpoints are expensive to run, but studies have shown that the rewards will more than make up for the cost. A study done by the Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs was constructed around a hypothetical community with 100, 000 licensed drivers. They

determined that a generously funded checkpoint program (consisting of 156 checkpoints per year) can be expected to reduce alcohol-related accidents by approximately 15 percent. It also estimated annual savings of the community to total \$7.9 million, which includes \$4.5 million for averted nonfatal injuries, \$3.1 million for averted fatalities, and \$0.3 million for averted property damage. The study ultimately determined that every dollar spent on a sobriety checkpoint can be expected to ultimately save the community over six dollars (Miller). The checkpoints serve as an investment in the safety of the community, and if they are managed properly and consistently, they can be beneficial to a community from an economic aspect as well as a safety aspect. Although the actual DUI arrest rate at these checkpoints may sometimes be less than ideal, those committing other crimes are caught as well. The Long Beach Police Department conducted a DUI checkpoint on Saturday, December 11, 2010. 1,735 vehicles passed through the checkpoint between 6 p. m. and 2 a. m., and of those 585 proved suspicious enough for screening. Among those 585 vehicles the following citations were issued: two DUI arrests, one felony arrest, three misdemeanor arrests, 20 citations for unlicensed driving, eight citations for driving with a suspended license, 28 vehicles were impounded, two vehicles were stored, and 14 other citations were issued (Miller). In addition, every single vehicle that passed safely through the checkpoint, became aware of the reality that these checkpoints are being maintained within their community, which in turn decreases their chances of choosing to drive while under the influence in the future. These checkpoints are designed for prevention of crimes just as much as they are for persecution. Furthermore,

in 1990, the Supreme Court ruled that the infringement of Fourth Amendment rights committed by sobriety checkpoints is overshadowed by the potential public benefit of removing impaired drivers from public roads, as they are a danger to other drivers. The court also instated a series of specific guidelines that all checkpoints throughout the nation must follow in order to be legal (Miller). The bottom line is that drunk driving is a very real problem in our society right now, and the bad decisions of a few put the lives of all in undeniable danger. Even at blood alcohol concentration levels as low as .02 percent, alcohol affects driving ability and crash likelihood. The probability of crash begins to increase significantly at .05 BAC, and climbs rapidly after about .08 BAC (Driving Under). Although San Luis Obispo has done a good job of arresting drunk drivers in the past, there is still much room for improvement. The only practical and efficient way to decrease the number of drunk drivers on our roads is to establish sobriety checkpoints throughout the city on nights with historically high DUI arrest rates. Doing so will ultimately save our city money by eliminating the costs of damage reparation caused by alcohol-related accidents, and it has been ruled completely legal and justified by the United States Supreme Court. The decision to install sobriety checkpoints will keep our residents from having to deal with the same grief and horror that struck the Pack family just a few years ago. The choice is obvious: install checkpoints, reduce expenditures, save lives.

Works Cited

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