

COMBATTING HUMAN TRAFFICKING ON WYOMING'S HIGHWAYS

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As many as 24.9 million men, women, and children are sold into prostitution, domestic servitude, or other forced labor around the globe. Commercial motor vehicle drivers and inspectors travel up and down our roadways every day and are more likely to be one of the first to see crimes of human trafficking. That's why awareness is critical. Knowing what to look for and how to respond is essential. Even though January was Human Trafficking Awareness Month, it is crucial to be vigilant in our human trafficking efforts year-round.

When asked why the Wyoming Highway Patrol is so passionate about Human Trafficking investigation and enforcement, Colonel Kebin Haller stated, "As Guardians of the Cowboy State, the Wyoming Highway Patrol (WHP) Troopers and Port of Entry Officers are the frontline of defense to identify both victims and traffickers involved in these horrific modern day slavery crimes."

WHP has partnered with three initiatives to accomplish this mission: Truckers Against Trafficking, Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance, and U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Center for Countering Human Trafficking and their Blue Campaign.

TRUCKERS AGAINST TRAFFICKING (TAT)

Truckers Against Trafficking (TAT) is a 501(c)3 that exists to educate, equip, empower, and mobilize members of the trucking, bus, and energy industries to combat human trafficking. The WHP has partnered with TAT to educate the commercial carrier industry and prepare them in the proper response to suspicious activity.

The WHP's activities with TAT include:

- ▶ WHP Commercial Carrier Section recently produced a public awareness video on YouTube and other social media outlets.
- ▶ WHP developed Human Trafficking educational license plates to be distributed at truck stops, rest areas, and other points within Wyoming that encounter high levels of truck traffic to increase awareness.
- ▶ WHP has distributed multiple TAT training webinars internally to include Human Trafficking and the Bus Industry; Rules of the Game; The Do's and Don'ts; Types of Traffickers; Demand Reduction Operations; Buyers, and the Inherent Violence in Prostitution; and Buyers' Rationales and the Impact on Society.
- ▶ WHP distributes TAT material at the ports of entry, and WHP members continue to receive TAT training. WHP also distributes the monthly TAT newsletter agency wide. Human Trafficking

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information is circulated at Wyoming Driver Services offices and Wyoming rest areas.

- ▶ WHP district captains work with division supervisors and troopers to visit bus terminals and truck stops with Be on the Lookout (BOTL) materials.
- ▶ WHP has sent out guidance agency-wide to include TAT training and education (specifically the BOTL and TAT videos) when providing safety presentations for trucking companies, bus companies, electric cooperatives, Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT) personnel, or any group they feel could benefit from learning about the TAT program.
- ▶ WYDOT Driver Services program accompanies commercial driver's licenses with a TAT and/or BOTL wallet card.
- ▶ WHP members are educated on how to obtain more TAT/BOTL information when they need it.
- ▶ WHP Ports of Entry host educational opportunities at the ports and truck stops throughout the state.

TAT also provides a 4-hour, in-depth law enforcement training on human trafficking and societal attitudes that contribute to a misunderstanding of prostitution, along with a victim-centered approach and case studies of inspection and interdiction stops that turned into human trafficking. This training is available to all law enforcement agencies. The WHP has hosted this class twice for both sworn and port of entry officers to attend.

COMMERCIAL VEHICLE SAFETY ALLIANCE

WHP has also partnered with the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance in launching an annual, three-day Human Trafficking Awareness Initiative.

Like Truckers Against Trafficking, the purpose of this initiative is to bring awareness and education about human trafficking to the commercial carrier industry, law enforcement, and the general public and provide the signs to look for along with the proper response if you suspect criminal activity is afoot.

"Human trafficking has been proven to be a growing problem in the US and Wyoming," said Wyoming Highway Patrol Commercial Carrier Lieutenant Dustin Ragon. "This is why the Wyoming Highway Patrol is assisting in the Human Trafficking Awareness Initiative to bring more light and gain assistance from the public and commercial drivers to reduce the occurrences."

Since human trafficking is often a crime hidden in plain sight, it is vital to be aware of its warning signs. Some indications that a person may be a victim of human trafficking include

(especially in the case of women and children):

- ▶ Appearing malnourished
- ▶ Showing signs of physical injuries and abuse
- ▶ Avoiding eye contact, social interaction, and authority figures/ law enforcement
- ▶ Seeming to adhere to scripted or rehearsed responses in social interactions
- ▶ Lacking official identification documents
- ▶ Appearing destitute/lacking personal possessions
- ▶ Working excessively long hours
- ▶ Living at a place of employment
- ▶ Checking into hotels/motels with older males and referring to those males as a boyfriend or "daddy," which is often street slang for pimp
- ▶ Poor physical or dental health
- ▶ Tattoos/ branding on the neck or lower back
- ▶ Untreated, sexually transmitted diseases
- ▶ Small children serving in a family restaurant
- ▶ Security measures that appear to keep people inside an establishment—barbed wire inside of a fence, bars covering the insides of windows
- ▶ Not allowing people to go into public alone or speak for themselves
- ▶ The person is often in the company of someone to whom he or she defers. Or someone who seems to be in control of the situation, e.g., where they go or who they talk to.
- ▶ The person appears to be coached on what to say.

These indicators were instrumental in a recent rescue of a 17-year-old girl on Wyoming highways. On January 23, 2022, a trooper observed a vehicle traveling westbound on I-80. There were two, older male occupants in the front seat with a juvenile female in the back seat. The trooper noticed the differences in ages and that the female was wearing a hooded sweatshirt and was trying to keep her face covered in a suspicious manner. The trooper was unable to obtain enough reasonable suspicion to conduct a traffic stop, so he



shared the information he had with a fellow trooper further west.

The second trooper observed the suspect vehicle violating the speed limit and initiated a traffic stop. During the stop, he conducted interviews with each of the occupants separately and was ultimately able to ascertain that the female was being taken to California to be used in an escort service. Due to the interstate travel of the suspects and victim, the case has been turned over to Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) and formal charges are pending.

The third leg of the WHP approach is participating in the U.S. Department of Homeland (DHS) Security's (DHS) Center for Countering Human Trafficking (CCHT) and their Blue Campaign.

BLUE CAMPAIGN

This is the first year the WHP has participated in the Blue Campaign, which is another educationally based initiative that works closely with the (DHS) to spread the awareness of human trafficking to the public, law enforcement, and the trucking industry. The Blue Campaign's educational awareness objectives are the prevention of human trafficking and the protection of exploited people.

If you or someone you know is a victim of human trafficking, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1 (888) 373-7888 or 911, or text "HELP" to 233733. The hotline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in more than 200 languages. All calls are confidential and answered live by highly trained, anti-trafficking hotline advocates.

Our partner RISS Project, the Western States Information Network, is hosting their 5-day, 6th Annual Human Trafficking Summit on May 9-13, 2022, in Sacramento, California. Details and registration information can be found at their website: <https://wsinhsummit.com/>

Additional information and resources can be found at:

- ▶ <https://www.whp.dot.state.wy.us>
- ▶ <https://truckersagainstrafficking.org/>
- ▶ <https://www.cvsa.org/>
- ▶ <https://www.dhs.gov/blue-campaign>

About the Author:

Keith Groeneweg is the RMIN Law Enforcement Information Coordinator for Wyoming after serving nearly 33 years with the Wyoming Highway Patrol (WHP). Keith started his career as a patrolman in Wheatland before taking his first promotion as a patrol Sergeant in Cody. He then served as captain of the WHP's Safety & Training section at headquarters in Cheyenne, where he oversaw the hiring and training of new recruits, the safety education programs, and the Records personnel. During this portion of his career, he worked with a team to develop the agency's Employee Assistance Program to include formalizing the counseling services, beginning a peer support team, and partnering with the Patrol's Family Support Network. Later, he started the WHP's chaplaincy program to further care for the agency's members. Keith also served at the rank of major as the Support Services Commander and retired as the Field Operations Commander. Throughout his career, Keith understood the importance of building relationships with city, county, state, and federal partners to best accomplish the mission of protecting the citizens of Wyoming. Keith is a graduate of the 206th session at the FBI National Academy.