

The West Springfield Shield



Welcome to the first issue of the redesigned **West Springfield Shield!** This newsletter is published every month and distributed online. To receive this newsletter, please sign up at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/police/newsletter/.

District Focus:

Keeping Students Safe and Alcohol-Free During Graduation Season

Officers from across Fairfax County are stepping up DWI enforcement and education efforts in an attempt to keep prom and graduation seasons safe. A variety of measures are taking place to ensure safe, alcohol-free driving on area roadways, as well as increased awareness on the severe consequences of underage alcohol use and purchase.

In 2008, there were 31 roadway fatalities in Fairfax County.

Of those, eight fatalities were under the age of 20. So far this year, 13 people have lost their lives on county roadways and one was under the age of 20.

Police are conducting weekly DWI checkpoints, and have increased roving DWI patrols around the clock. Alcohol stings, using underage police cadets to enter businesses and attempt to purchase alcohol are taking place throughout Fairfax County. Large electronic signs posted with DWI warnings are stationed at heavily traveled intersections. For the first time, the police department has partnered with George Mason University, where many Fairfax County Public School graduation ceremonies are held, with a message encouraging responsible driving emblazoned on the large, electronic sign at the Braddock Road entrance to the university.

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A variable message board displaying an alcohol-free message for students. The boards, supplied by the Virginia Department of Transportation, were placed near all six of the district's high schools.

Tips for Teens: The Truth about Alcohol

- Alcohol affects your brain. Drinking excess alcohol leads to a loss of coordination, poor judgment, slowed reflexes, distorted vision, memory lapses and even blackouts.
- Alcohol affects your body. Alcohol can damage every organ in your body. It is absorbed directly into your bloodstream and can increase your risk for a variety of life-threatening diseases, including cancer.
- Alcohol affects your self-control. Alcohol depresses your central nervous system, lowers your inhibitions, and impairs your judgment. Drinking can lead to risky behaviors, including having unprotected sex. This may expose you to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases or cause unwanted pregnancy.
- Alcohol can kill you. Drinking large amounts of alcohol can lead to coma or even death. Also, in 1998, 35.8 percent of traffic deaths of 15 to 20-year-olds were alcohol-related.
- Alcohol can hurt you -- even if you're not the one drinking. If you're around people who are drinking, you have an increased risk of being seriously injured, involved in car crashes or affected by violence. At the very least, you may have to deal with people who are sick, out of control or unable to take care of themselves.
- Before You Risk It: Know the law. It is illegal to buy or possess alcohol if you are under 21.

- Stay informed. "Binge" drinking means having five or more drinks on one occasion. About 15 percent of teens are binge drinkers in any given month.



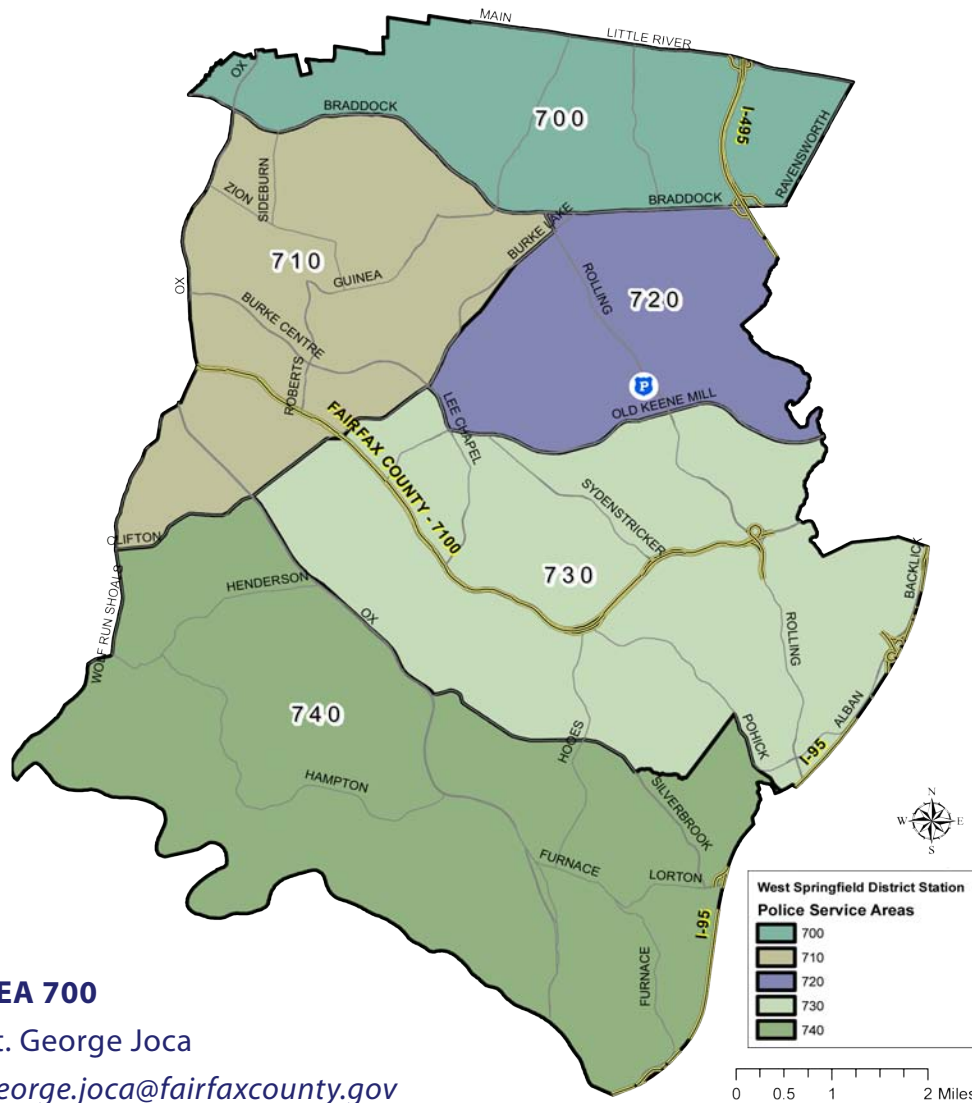
West Springfield High School students observe a mock DUI accident. West Springfield District Station officers with the help of Fire Station 27, conducted the event that included a fatality and ultimate arrest of a juvenile driver.

- Know the risks. Mixing alcohol with medications or illicit drugs is extremely dangerous and can lead to accidental death. Alcohol-medication interactions may be a factor in at least 25 percent of emergency room admissions.
- Look around you. Most teens aren't drinking alcohol. Research shows that 70 percent of people 12-20 years old haven't had a drink in the past month.

What can you do to help someone who has a drinking problem? Be a real friend. You might even save a life. Encourage your friend to stop or seek professional help. For information and referrals, call the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information at 800-729-6686.

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Police Service Areas and Supervisors



AREA 700

- Lt. George Joca
george.joca@fairfaxcounty.gov
- Sgt. Naveed Butt
naveed.butt@fairfaxcounty.gov

AREA 710

- Lt. Mike Reser
michael.reser@fairfaxcounty.gov
- Sgt. Todd Juris
todd.juris@fairfaxcounty.gov

AREA 720

- Lt. Cliff Sharp
cliff.sharp@fairfaxcounty.gov
- Sgt. Richard Theal
richard.theal@fairfaxcounty.gov

AREA 730

- Lt. Ken Bresson
ken.bresson@fairfaxcounty.gov
- Sgt. Robert Jackson
robert.jackson@fairfaxcounty.gov

AREA 740

- Sgt. Darrell Nichols
darrell.nichols@fairfaxcounty.gov
- Sgt. Dave Plaska
david.plaska@fairfaxcounty.gov

The West Springfield District Station Team

Station Commander

- Captain Bruce Ferguson

Assistant Commander

- Lieutenant David Crank

Crime Prevention Unit

- MPO Pete Feigleson
peter.feigleson@fairfaxcounty.gov
- MPO J.T. Frey
jt.frey@fairfaxcounty.gov

S.T.R.I.K.E. Team

(Strategic Traffic and Roadway Initiatives, Knowledge and Education for residents)

- PFC Thomas Champ
- PFC Dave Parker

Crime Analyst

- Angelique Abbott



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6140 Rolling Road
Springfield, Virginia 22152
www.fairfaxcounty.gov/police/stations/westspringfield/
703-644-7377, TTY 711

Editor

Ellen Kamilakis
ellen.kamilakis@fairfaxcounty.gov
703-644-5026, TTY 711

Please contact the editor with any comments, questions or suggestions.



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To request this information in an alternate format, call Fairfax County Police Department, West Springfield Station Crime Prevention Office, 703-644-5026, TTY 711.