

# Stiff drunk-driving law signed

**The Associated Press**

Juneau — Despite reservations about the cost and impact on already crowded prisons, Gov. Bill Sheffield signed legislation today designed to get drunken drivers off Alaska's highways.

The measure increases jail sentences and fines and gives judges the authority to confiscate the vehicles of drunken drivers. It also subjects suspects who refuse to take breath tests to the same penalties as someone who cooperates.

There had been speculation that Sheffield might veto the bill, because of his comments on the cost and the additional burden on the already troubled corrections system.

In a letter to legislative leaders, Sheffield said "drunk drivers are among society's greatest menaces, and I am firmly committed to reducing this threat to Alaska's citizens."

But he also questioned the

punitive philosophy behind the legislation.

"There is no clear evidence to suggest that raising penalties alone will substantially reduce the number of drunk drivers on our roads," Sheffield said.

Alcohol treatment, public education and personal accountability are other factors that must be considered in coping with the problem, he said.

He also asked lawmakers to rework the provisions dealing with forfeiture of vehicles. He called the existing language "unnecessarily complicated and incomplete."

Under the new law, first-time offenders still face a mandatory 72-hour jail sentence. But a second offense would bring an automatic minimum sentence of 20 days, instead of the current 10. And a third offense would mean 30 days in jail.

Minimum fines of \$250, \$500 and \$1,000 would be imposed for each offense. Currently, the law allows a maximum fine of \$1,000.

The first-time offender would lose driving privileges for 30 days. The suspension climbs to 1 year for a second offense and 10 years for a third offense.

Judges could order the forfeiture of vehicles after more than one drunken driving conviction.