

SafeDriver Monthly Newsletter

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Fatal Teen Driving Mistakes

On the last weekend of March, a [teen girl in Arizona was killed](#) after making several of the most common teen driving mistakes. She drove through a red light and then hit a raised median causing her to roll over. She wasn't wearing a seat belt and was thrown from the vehicle and killed.



A significant number of fatal teen crashes like this one are single vehicle crashes where the driver loses control of the vehicle. Most often control is lost when the driver, who is distracted, runs off the road and then tries to overcorrect by steering sharply back onto the road causing the car to flip and tumble.

The news article didn't say if the teen was distracted but distracted driving is one of the major causes of teen crashes. Teen drivers are either distracted by texting, or by other

teens in the car. Regardless of the type of distraction, the driver's eyes and mind are off of the road and a lot can happen and the vehicle can travel a significant distance in just the two or three seconds that the driver may be distracted.

Driving through a red light or stop sign could be caused by driver distraction or by the teen assuming that no other traffic will be approaching at an intersection where the traffic is normally very light. That can be a fatal assumption. Regardless of how inactive an intersection may be, the assumption should be made that there is traffic approaching and it's not safe to proceed through the intersection.

Teens, who may have been religious about wearing a seat belt while learning to drive, seem to abandon seat belt use in large numbers after they get their license. Boys use seat belts less than girls and, even when they normally wear seat belts when driving alone, will ignore seat belts when driving with their friends in the vehicle.

The point needs to be driven home while teaching a teen to drive that the safety rules aren't in place just to pass the road test; they're there to save lives over the long haul. The best time to start teaching a child those important driving safety lessons is by setting the example when they are toddlers and continuing the example throughout their lives.



Hosting a Teen Party

The end of March saw the conviction of a couple for allowing teen alcohol consumption in their home. The couple, from Kent County Michigan, pleaded no contest to a criminal misdemeanor charge of allowing alcohol consumption by a minor on premises at a social gathering.



The judge in the case said that they knowingly allowed alcohol consumption at the birthday party attended by 25 to 30 of their daughter's classmates. One of those teens left the party and lost control of his vehicle causing it to flip and burst into flames. His autopsy revealed that his blood alcohol content (BAC) was almost three times higher than the legal limit in Michigan.

The couple was sentenced to each serve 15 days in Kent County Jail, pay \$1,000 each in fines, complete one year of probation, complete community service and attend a victim impact meeting.

Many parents have the attitude that teens are going to drink anyway and it's better to have them drink at home than out on the street. All too often, that attitude has fatal consequences. Underage drinking is illegal in all 50 states and hosts who allow, or turn a blind eye to drinking by teens can be held liable for the consequences.

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Automatically Speeding

A recent [study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety](#) showed that newer safety features in automobiles are being misused in dangerous ways.

Failing to watch your speed and allowing it to creep up while moving with the flow of traffic has led to many a speeding ticket for absent-minded drivers. We have always encouraged the use of cruise control that, when set at the legal speed limit, prevents that tendency to allow the speed to get away from you.

Newer cars have combined the cruise control with a lane departure warning system and a radar controlled braking system that slows the vehicle when it gets too close to the vehicle ahead. This system is known as the Adaptive Cruise Control (ACC) and, when selected by the driver, allows the driver to set the cruising speed and distance at which the system will apply automatic braking behind the vehicle ahead.



The problem revealed in the survey is that too many drivers are setting the ACC at speeds well over the legal speed limit.

The IIHS study followed 40 drivers from the Boston metro area who were supplied with ACC equipped vehicles. The results showed that drivers were 24 percent more likely to drive over the speed limit on limited access highways when the ACC system was selected. The amount at which the drivers sped was greater with the ACC system selected than when they were driving manually.

While the system is an excellent life saving feature, the study showed that, when the system is misused, drivers had a ten percent greater risk of being involved in a fatal crash. The higher the speed, the greater the crash forces and that puts drivers at greater risk.

The safety systems that are included in newer cars make the vehicle much safer but they still don't relieve the driver of the responsibility to monitor their driving and to obey the traffic laws.

