

Safe Driving Teen Monthly Bulletin

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Teen Dies in Crash with Fire Truck

Sixteen-year-old Erika Schwager crashed into a fire truck after speeding up to try to beat the fire truck through an intersection. After spending five days in critical condition at an area hospital, Schwager was removed from a chemically induced coma and died.

Source: *DesMoinesRegister.com* ♦

Lessons Learned

Not every emergency medical response requires lights and sirens, but if an emergency vehicle is using lights and/or sirens, yield immediately so the emergency personnel can reach the person who is waiting for help to arrive.

In an emergency, minutes can mean the difference between life and death, and critical seconds can be lost if drivers don't make way for emergency vehicles. Take sirens seriously.

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You can help emergency personnel reach a person in need. Use the acronym S-I-R-E-N to remember the correct way to yield to an emergency vehicle.

S - Stay Alert: Drive defensively, keep the noise level down in your vehicle, and look for more than one emergency vehicle approaching when you hear a siren.

I - Investigate: Check your rearview mirror, scan in front and on both sides of your vehicle, try to estimate the speed of the emergency vehicle, and plan your next move.

R - React: React quickly, but calmly, and scan in all directions before pulling over to the closest edge of the road. Pull as far off the highway as you can, as safely as possible. Stop and remain stopped until the emergency vehicles pass. Don't slam on the brakes or pull over suddenly. Gradually brake to avoid losing control in loose gravel on the shoulder. Always use a turn signal when exiting the roadway.

E - Enter: Before reentering the roadway, make a visual sweep in all directions. Turn on your turn signal, and gradually merge back into traffic.

N - Never Block or Follow: Never stop in a place that doesn't have enough room to pull over safely or blocks the emergency vehicle. Never try to outrun an emergency vehicle or follow an emergency vehicle closely.

Be alert for pedestrians and bicyclists who may be in the crosswalk or at the edge of the roadway. They might be looking at the emergency vehicle as well, and may not be aware of your efforts to yield properly.

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Charges Filed Against Teen in Car Crash

Heather M. Kelly, 18, has been charged with Driving While Intoxicated, Failure to Reduce Speed on a Curve, and Failure to Keep Right after a car crash in which she and three of her friends suffered minor injuries.

Source: newswatch50.com ♦

Lessons Learned

When a person consumes alcohol, most of the alcohol is not digested. It is absorbed directly and quickly into the bloodstream through the lining of the stomach and small intestines. Once alcohol enters the bloodstream, it circulates to the brain. Since the absorption of alcohol begins as soon as drinking begins, it reaches the drinker's brain within minutes. Alcohol has the greatest effect on the parts of the brain that control judgment and reasoning, the most critical skills needed by drivers. Physical abilities become impaired soon after.

A driver affected by alcohol has a decreased ability to reason clearly and to make sound judgments. However, the driver may believe that thinking and judging abilities are sharper and quicker than usual. Some people believe that they can do things better after one or two drinks. One common effect of alcohol on behavior is a feeling of wellbeing. This feeling is known as euphoria. Euphoria can make a person feel energized and confident. Alcohol-induced euphoria can cause people to take chances they normally would not take. But this behavior can be deadly behind the wheel of a vehicle, because euphoria is only a state of mind. Alcohol is a depressant. It slows down the working of the nervous system. Thinking and judging abilities are duller and slower than usual.

Alcohol quickly diminishes the drinker's ability to concentrate. A decrease in the ability to concentrate greatly increases a driver's level of risk. A person's driving ability can be reduced after only one drink and driving ability decreases as the amount of alcohol in a person's body increases. An alcohol-impaired driver is less apt to interpret correctly what he or she sees.

Alcohol also weakens a driver's inhibitions, which are the inner forces of a person's personality that restrain one's impulsive behavior. For example, a

driver who is under the influence might attempt a left turn in front of traffic that he or she would not attempt when sober. A driver's inhibitions weaken as the alcohol content in the body increases. A person who is drinking may drive too fast, take needless risks, or even drive into emergency situations without realizing what is happening.

As more alcohol enters the bloodstream, the area of the brain that controls muscular movements begins to slow down. Even after the driver recognizes danger, the brain takes longer than normal to process the information and react to the danger. Messages the brain sends to different parts of the body might become confused.

The muscular reactions of a driver who has been drinking can become slow and clumsy. Steering and braking movements can become uncoordinated. The driver might oversteer, brake late or not brake at all. The driver might not be able to negotiate turns properly and safely. Reaction time may be doubled and reflexes will be slower. These actions can cause drinking drivers to be involved in serious crashes.

A driver who has been drinking may not be able to react to a situation that a sober driver could easily handle. Even if the drinking driver is able to react, he or she may not do the right thing, or may react too late, resulting in an accident that the sober driver would have been able to avoid. Alcohol makes it difficult for any driver to react to complex driving situations. In a complex driving situation, more than one thing demands the driver's attention. For example, as a driver approaches a traffic light, a pedestrian may step off the curb to cross the street ahead. As the traffic light changes, a motorcyclist might change lanes suddenly in front of the driver.



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Teen Dies in Wreck Caused by Fog

David Plagens, 18, died at the scene when his truck struck a cement barrier on a bridge and caught fire. Dense fog may have been a factor in the crash, which remained under investigation.

Source: *theeagle.com* ♦

Lessons Learned

We cannot avoid environmental conditions when we drive. Sometimes, conditions are favorable: a clear day with good visibility. Other times, challenging environmental conditions such as rain, fog and wind exist. Understanding how to properly handle these challenging conditions will make driving in them safer and more enjoyable.

Even a day filled with sunshine can present problems when driving. Too much light can make it difficult to see ahead. Wear sunglasses or use your sun visor. Always keep the lower edge of the sun visor pushed toward the windshield. Clean the inside of your windshield and all windows at least once per week. Sunshine on a dirty windshield creates glare.

Night driving requires adjustments too. The lack of light reduces detail and conceals hazards such as pedestrians, bicycles, stalled cars, and curves. It is more difficult to judge the speed and position of other vehicles. You must depend largely on your headlights, which will show only a relatively short and narrow path ahead. Headlights do not bend around corners; they will only illuminate what is directly in front of you. Highway lighting may be limited. Glare from roadway lights, business signs, and the headlights of oncoming vehicles may impair your visibility. Follow these tips for safer night driving:

- Keep your panel lights dim for better vision, but make sure panel lights are bright enough to read your speedometer and other gauges.
- Turn your headlights on at twilight. Even if you don't need them to see the road, they will help other drivers to see you.
- Low-beam headlights are only effective for speeds up to 20-25 mph. You must use special care when driving faster than these speeds, since you are unable to detect pedestrians, bicyclists and others.
- High-beam headlights can reveal objects up to a distance of at least 450 feet and are most effective for speeds faster than 25 mph.

- Reduce your speed so you can stop within the distance illuminated by your headlights.
- Increase your seeing distance by keeping the headlights clean and properly aimed.
- When following another vehicle or when an oncoming vehicle approaches you, switch your headlights to low beams so you don't blind the driver. Don't use high-beam headlights within 500 feet of oncoming vehicles or within 300 feet of vehicles you are following.
- If a vehicle comes toward you with high beams on, flash your lights to high beam and back to low beam once. Don't look directly at oncoming headlights. Instead, watch the right edge of your lane. Look quickly to be sure of the other vehicle's position every few seconds.

Other conditions that can greatly affect visibility are fog, haze, smoke and mist. Be especially careful of patches of fog in valleys and low-lying areas. It is best not to drive in fog or smoke. If you must, slow down, turn on your low beam headlights, and be ready for a fast stop. Use windshield wipers in heavy fog. If the fog or smoke becomes so thick that you cannot see well enough to keep driving, pull off the road until conditions improve. Pull over as far to the right as possible, off the main travel portion of the roadway. Leave your parking lights on and activate your hazard lights. If you must keep driving, drive slowly, but keep your vehicle moving. Be alert for slow-moving or stopped traffic. Check your rearview mirrors frequently for vehicles that are approaching quickly from the rear.

During rainy conditions, wet roads will increase stopping distance. Driving is more dangerous even when only a few drops of rain fall. Roads are most slippery just after it begins to rain because the rain mixes with oil dropped from cars onto the road, creating a very slick surface.

When you are driving in the rain, slow down. Driving too fast in the rain makes hydroplaning more likely. When a car hydroplanes, the tires ride on a thin film of water instead of on the road. When this happens, you can easily lose control and skid.



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The advertisement features a woman sitting at a desk with a laptop, smiling. The text is overlaid on a dark background.

Teen Dead after Car Collides with Train

Zachary Witham, 17, was killed when his car collided with a Union Pacific train on the tracks on November 11. A passenger in the vehicle survived the crash.

Source: *Radiolowa.com* ♦

Lessons Learned

Railroad crossings are a type of intersection. Like highway intersections, they can be very dangerous. But a collision between a passenger vehicle and a train will almost always leave the occupants of the passenger vehicle in a much worse condition than those of the train. Railroad crossings have their own unique markings.

There are two types of railroad crossings: controlled and uncontrolled.

Controlled crossings usually have both red lights and crossing gates. You must make a complete stop when the lights are flashing and/or the gates are down. Remain stopped until the lights stop flashing and the gates are raised.

An uncontrolled crossing is one that does not have red lights or a crossing gate. However, like a controlled crossing, an uncontrolled crossing is marked with a round yellow advance warning sign placed ahead of the crossing. This advance warning sign tells you to slow down, look and listen for a train. Be prepared to stop at the tracks in the event that a train is approaching. A crossbuck sign marks the railroad crossing. Some of the more dangerous crossings have a stop sign.

When you approach any railroad crossing, slow down and check traffic behind you. Be aware of other vehicles approaching you at an unsafe speed. Reduce the noise level in your vehicle by turning your radio down or off. If necessary, lower your window. Listen for train sounds. If you hear a train, stop. The sound of a train whistle is carried in the opposite direction from the direction of the traveling train. Even if the sound of the whistle is faint, the train may be very close to you.

If a train is approaching, stop at a safe distance before the railroad tracks. When the train has passed, make sure the intersection is clear and that another train is not approaching on another track

before you attempt to cross. A sign below the crossbuck will indicate how many sets of tracks you will be passing.

When crossing the railroad tracks, reduce your speed to handle a potential rough ride, but do not linger on the tracks. Check both ways on the tracks. Make sure any vehicles ahead of you have cleared the tracks before you start to cross. Drive onto the tracks only when you have enough space to clear the tracks. Never stop on the railroad tracks to wait for traffic ahead to move.

Be prepared to stop behind buses or trucks that are hauling flammable contents.

The round black-on-yellow warning sign is placed ahead of a public highway-rail intersection. The advance warning sign tells you to slow down, look and listen for trains, and be prepared to stop if a train is coming.

Pavement markings mean the same as the advance warning sign. They consist of an X with the letters RR and no-passing markings on two-lane roads. There may be a white stop line painted on the pavement before the railroad tracks.

Parallel track signs are diamond-shaped with black illustrations showing railroad tracks parallel to the highway. These signs warn drivers who are making a turn that there is a highway-rail intersection immediately after the turn.

A stop sign at a highway-rail intersection means the same as it does at a highway intersection. You must come to a complete stop. Look and listen for a train. Proceed when it is safe to do so.

When there is more than one set of tracks at a crossing, a sign beneath the crossbucks with a number will indicate how many tracks are present. Watch for additional trains coming from either direction.

Do not stop on the tracks signs may be posted on the right side of the road or the far side of the tracks.

There are two kinds of exempt signs. The first is a sign below the crossbuck with a white background and black letters that say EXEMPT. The second is a sign below the advanced warning sign with a yellow background and black letters that say EXEMPT. An exempt sign means that the railroad crossing has been abandoned or its use has been discontinued.

In some states, a track out of service sign may be posted at a crossing that has been abandoned.