Safe Driving Teen Monthly Bulletin

Volume 73, Issue 35 **June 2007**

Teen Dies in Tragic Car Crash

An 18-year-old passenger was seriously injured and the 18-year-old driver was killed in a Memorial Day car crash near Ozark, Alabama. Speed was a factor in the crash.

Source: WTYVNews4.com♦

Lessons Learned

Exceeding the speed limit or driving too fast for conditions is a contributing factor in as many as one-third of all fatal crashes. In addition, many people are injured in speed-related collisions. More drivers are convicted of speeding than of any other offense. The safe speed is the one that allows you to have complete control of your vehicle.

Higher speeds reduce maneuverability, increase stopping distances, and decrease reaction time. Problems caused by increased speed are often magnified in adverse conditions, such as poor visibility or on wet or snowy roads. At sufficiently high speeds, the physical limits of the vehicle or roadway may be exceeded.

In every vehicle crash, there are actually three collisions:

1. The vehicle's collision

When a vehicle crashes into another vehicle or a solid, immovable object, it crushes, absorbing some of the force of the collision.

2. The human collision

At the moment of impact, the driver and passengers in the vehicle are still traveling at the vehicle's original speed. When the vehicle comes to a complete stop, the occupants continue to be hurled forward until they come in contact with some part of the vehicle, such as the steering wheel, dashboard, front window, or back of the front seat. Occupants in a crash can also cause serious injuries to other occupants when they collide with each other.

3. The human body's collision

In a crash, the internal organs are still moving even after a human body comes to a complete stop. The internal organs can slam into other organs of the skeletal system. This internal collision is often the cause of serious injury or death. For example, a person's head might collide with the windshield of the car during the second collision. The still-moving brain then collides with the inside of the skull, causing swelling and/or bleeding. This is the third collision.

Inside This Issue

Published by the National Safety Commission for Teens and their Parents

Dog Distracts Teen Driver, Causes Fatal Crash

A 15-year-old girl was killed and four others, including the driver, were injured when a dog in the car distracted the 18-year-old driver. The driver lost control of the vehicle, which crossed the northbound lane, ran off the road into a ditch, and struck an embankment and overturned, ejecting the girl who died.

Source: BradfordERA.com♦

Lessons Learned

According to a 2002 NHTSA/Gallup Poll, drivers often allow their attention to be diverted from their driving by one or more of the following:

- Aggressive driving/road rage: According to the American College of Emergency Physicians, aggressive driving is a factor in thousands of highway deaths a year. Speeding, tailgating, running red lights and/or stop signs, unsafe maneuvers such as driving on the shoulder and weaving in and out of traffic, and generally disregarding public or personal safety are all examples of aggressive driving. The Florida Legislature created a law against aggressive, careless driving in 2001. Motorists who commit at least two traffic violations simultaneously or in succession can be cited. For example, speeding and running a red light, or following too closely and failing to yield right of way.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration points out that it does not take long to find examples of aggressive driving on our roadways. Most of us see it every day - the road racer, the tailgater, the frequent lane changer, the red light runner. The atmosphere created by aggressive drivers is scary. In fact, an American Automobile Association (AAA) survey found that in some areas of the country, aggressive drivers are perceived as a bigger safety threat than impaired drivers.

- Cellular phones: About 30% of all drivers use a cell phone while driving to make outgoing or incoming calls on at least some of their driving trips. An estimated 292,000 drivers were involved in a crash attributed to cell phone use between 1997 and 2002.
- Drowsiness: 37% of the driving population says they have nodded off for at least a moment or fallen asleep while driving at some time in their life. An estimated 7.5 million drivers have fallen asleep while driving within the last month. While some hold the perception that drowsy driving occurs mostly late at night or in the early morning hours, just 28% of drivers reporting a recent drowsy driving experience report this experience occurring between the hours of midnight and 6:00 a.m. More than one-third (35%) of drivers who nodded off while driving within the past six months say their last experience occurred between 6:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. An additional 17% report they nodded off between 5:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m.
- Dealing with children: Nearly one in four (24%) drivers deal with children in the back seat of the car while driving. This behavior can be especially distracting if the driver actually turns around to adjust the occupants or pick up a lost toy or offer food.
- Eating or drinking: Half of all drivers (49%) report eating or drinking at least occasionally while driving, with 14% doing so on three-quarters or more of their driving trips.

Other distracting behaviors:

- 8% engage in personal grooming (such as putting on make-up, shaving, or looking in the mirror)
- 12% look at maps or directions
- 4% read printed material (such as a book, newspaper, or mail).

When you drive, don't allow distractions to interfere with your driving. Put safety first!

Unbelted Teen Driver Killed in Rollover Crash

A 17-year-old boy was killed when his car flipped over and he was ejected from the vehicle in an early-morning Memorial Day crash. The teen, who was not wearing a seat belt, lost control while driving in the high speed lane; the vehicle rolled over after hitting the median guardrail.

Source: TheSunChronicle.com♦

Lessons Learned

As the driver of your vehicle, you are responsible for ensuring that all safety equipment is used in accordance with the law.

In a crash, you are far more likely to be killed if you are not wearing a safety belt. Research has found that use of lap/shoulder belts reduces the risk of fatal injury to front-seat passenger-car occupants by 45 percent and the risk of moderate-to-critical injury by 50 percent. For light truck occupants, safety belts reduce the risk of fatal injury by 60 percent and moderate-to-critical injury by 65 percent. In 2004, the use of safety belts saved 15,434 lives. If all occupants of passenger vehicles wore their safety belts, an additional 5,839 lives could have been saved in 2004.

Wear your safety belt and shoulder harness properly. In a crash, you are far more likely to be killed if you are not wearing a safety belt. Wearing shoulder belts and lap belts make your chances of living through a crash twice as good.

If you are involved in a crash, your seat belt will keep you from being thrown from your vehicle. If you are thrown from your vehicle in the crash, your risk of death is five times greater. In fatal crashes in 2004, 74 percent of passenger vehicle occupants who were totally ejected from the vehicle were killed.

Seat belts keep you from being thrown against others in the vehicle. Seat belts also keep you from being thrown against parts of your vehicle, such as the steering wheel or windshield. They keep the driver behind the wheel, where he or she can control the vehicle.

Wear a shoulder belt only with a lap belt. Wear your safety belt every time you get in your vehicle, not just for long trips or on high-speed highways. More than half of the crashes that cause injury or death happen at speeds less than 40 mph and within 25 miles from home.

In 2004 in the US, there were 417 passenger vehicle occupant fatalities among children under 4 years of age. Of these fatalities, an estimated 35 percent were totally unrestrained.

Research on the effectiveness of child safety seats has found them to reduce fatal injury by 71 percent for infants (less than one year old) and by 54 percent for toddlers (1-4 years old) in passenger cars.

In light trucks, use of child safety seats reduces fatal injury by 58 percent for infants and by 59 percent for toddlers.

Among children under 5 years old, an estimated 451 lives were saved in 2004 by child restraint use. At 100 percent child safety seat use for children under 5, an estimated additional 114 lives could have been saved.

Vehicle manufacturers include the following additional safety devices to make your vehicle safer:

- Door locks: Door locks provide better protection in a collision, preventing occupants from being ejected.
- Collapsible steering columns: The steering column collapses in a collision so a driver's chest is protected from injury. The steering column absorbs some of the impact forces in a collision.
- Padded dashboards: Padded dashboards are designed to cushion the occupant if the occupant comes in contact with the dashboard.
- Rearview mirror: Rearview mirrors are glued on the windshield, not bolted to the frame of the vehicle. If the occupant comes in contact with the mirror, the injury is less severe.
- Recessed knobs on the panel: Vehicle designs try to eliminate any sharp or protruding knobs such as heater controls, radio knobs, and windshield wiper switches.
- Recessed door handles: Door handles are designed to be somewhat recessed and smooth to prevent injury if occupants make contact with the handles.

Teen Pedestrian Struck by Car, Injured

A 15-year-old teen was hospitalized with injuries after being struck by a car in Urbana, Illinois. She and a friend were running across the street in front of traffic when she was hit.

Source: News-Gazette.com♦

Lessons Learned

In the United States in 2004, pedestrian fatalities accounted for 11 percent of all fatalities from motor vehicle crashes. A total of 4,641 pedestrians were killed and 68,000 were injured. Single motor vehicle crashes accounted for over 90 percent of all pedestrian fatalities. On average, one pedestrian is killed in a traffic crash every 113 minutes and one pedestrian is injured in a traffic crash every eight minutes.

Most pedestrian fatalities occurred in urban areas (72 percent), at non-intersection locations (79 percent), in normal weather conditions (89 percent), and at night (66 percent). Nearly half of all pedestrian fatalities occurred on the weekend (Friday-Sunday). Nearly half of the fatalities occurred between 6:00 p.m. and midnight.

Thirty-four percent of pedestrians killed in 2004 in the US had a blood alcohol concentration of .08 or greater. Thirteen percent of the drivers involved in the fatal crashes were under the influence of alcohol.

Of all the highway users, pedestrians are the most vulnerable. Drivers must watch for and protect pedestrians. Many pedestrians who do not drive are not fully aware of all the traffic laws and signals. They may not understand the distance required for a motor vehicle to stop. They may assume that drivers will yield the right-of-way to anyone in the crosswalk.

When a pedestrian crosses at an intersection with a green light, she or he may not even look for oncoming traffic. Pedestrians waiting to cross the street often stand in the street instead of on the curb. They may even dash across the street without warning. During a rainstorm, pedestrians may be more concerned about protection from the weather than moving traffic. Be alert for pedestrians at night, even in well-lighted areas.

Children and the elderly are the pedestrians who are most at risk. Children may act impulsively and run into traffic without thinking. The elderly make take longer to cross the street. They may not be able to see or hear well, making them unaware of possible dangers. Never assume that pedestrians will move out of the way. In some situations, you may have to stop to allow a pedestrian to cross safely.

Always watch for pedestrians when leaving an alley or driveway. Stop before crossing the sidewalk and look both ways. You may encounter joggers on the street; if the jogger is facing away from you and wearing a music headset, she or he may not hear you coming. Pass with caution.

The moment you step from your vehicle, you are a pedestrian. The knowledge you have about driving will make you more aware of possible problems and conflicts with pedestrians.

The primary traveling aids for a person who is blind are often a white cane or a trained guide dog. Independent travel involves some risk that can be greatly reduced when you, the driver, are aware of the use and meaning of a white cane or guide dog.

Drivers must always yield the right-of-way to persons who are blind.

Whenever a pedestrian that is mobility impaired (using a wheelchair, crutches, cane or walker) is in the crosswalk, all drivers must stop to allow the pedestrian to cross safely and allow for any necessary precautions. Once the pedestrian has crossed safely, drivers may proceed with caution.

On average, 14 school-age pedestrians are killed by school buses (or vehicles used as school buses) each year, and 6 are killed by other vehicles involved in school bus-related crashes. More school-age pedestrians are killed in the afternoon than in the morning, with 41 percent of the fatalities occurring in crashes between 3:00 and 4:00 PM.

In 45 percent of all crashes involving fatalities to occupants of a school bus or vehicle used as a school bus, the principal point of impact was the front of the vehicle.

Since 1989, 1,445 people have died in school bus-related crashes – an average of 131 fatalities per year. Sixty-five percent of the people who lost their lives in those crashes were occupants of other vehicles involved. Non-occupants (pedestrians, bicyclists, etc.) accounted for 25 percent of the deaths, and school bus occupants accounted for 10 percent.