Safe Driving Teen Monthly Bulletin

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Teen Killed in Crash Caused by Speeding

A 16-year-old Ohio boy was killed in a single-vehicle crash caused by speeding. His car left the road, hit a light pole and flipped several time, ejecting the teen; the car then burst into flames.

Source: DecaturDailyDemocrat.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 on wet or snowy roads. At sufficiently high speeds, the physical limits of the vehicle or roadway may be exceeded.

The energy absorbed by a vehicle in a crash is highly variable. Energy is absorbed by:

1. vehicle design
2. the area of the vehicle struck
3. the type of material struck
4. the support in that area of the vehicle

Vehicles are designed to absorb energy forces in a manner that will reduce the direct forces that reach the vehicle occupants. Energy absorption is directly dependent on vehicle speed, angles of collision, and area of vehicle contacts. In any given collision each vehicle will experience a change in speed during the moment of collision. Depending on each vehicle's initial speed, this change in speed takes only milliseconds. There is very little time for the vehicle components to collapse, bend, fold or crumple in a manner that will protect the occupants within the vehicle.

In a direct rear-end collision of two passenger vehicles, much of the energy forces may be absorbed by the bumper systems alone, particularly at lower speeds. If one of the vehicles is a large truck, considerably more energy will be transmitted to the occupants of the smaller vehicle.

An angular collision is different. Acute angles may be considered sideswipe collisions as opposed to a 90-degree T-bone type crash. Usually, the larger the angle, the more energy is transmitted to the occupant compartment.

Inside This Issue

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Teen in Critical Condition after Crash with Multiple Causes

A 17-year-old girl faces charges for Driving While Under the Influence of Alcohol and Vehicular Assault after a crash which left her 17-year-old female passenger, who was not wearing a seat belt, in critical condition. The driver told police she had been drinking and was traveling at 55 to 60 mph just prior to the collision, and lost control on the wet road prior to striking a power pole; the window next to the passenger shattered and she struck her head on the pole.

Source: kxro.com♦

Lessons Learned

Impaired driving is the leading cause of brain injury and paralysis in the United States. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that alcohol was involved in 39 percent of fatal crashes and in seven percent of all crashes in 2004. The 16,694 fatalities in alcohol-related crashes during 2004 represent an average of one alcohol-related fatality every 31 minutes. An estimated 248,000 persons were injured in crashes where police reported that alcohol was present - an average of one person injured every approximately every two minutes.

In 2004, 86 percent of all traffic fatalities occurred in crashes in which at least one driver or nonoccupant had a BAC of .08 or greater. Sixty-nine percent of the 14,409 people killed in such crashes were intoxicated.

The rate of alcohol involvement in fatal crashes is more than three times as high at night as during the day. For all crashes, the rate of alcohol involvement is five times higher at night. In 2004, 30 percent of all fatal crashes during the week were alcohol-related, compared to 51 percent on weekends. For all crashes, the alcohol involvement rate was 5 percent during the week and 12 percent during the weekend.

The highest intoxication rates in 2004 were recorded for drivers 21-24 years old (32 percent), followed by drivers aged 25-34 (27 percent) and drivers aged 35-44 (23 percent).

Economic costs of alcohol-related traffic collisions come from:

- property damage – to vehicles, roads, road signs, barriers such as guardrails, etc.
- emergency and acute health care costs
- long-term care and rehabilitation
- costs associated with travel delays, such as when a lane of traffic is closed for clean-up after a collision
- legal and court costs
- police and emergency services
- insurance administration costs
- disability and workers' compensation
- social services for those who cannot return to work and support their families.

In 2000, alcohol-involved crashes resulted in $50.9 billion in economic costs, accounting for 22 percent of all crash costs. The impact of alcohol involvement increases with injury severity. Alcohol-involved crashes accounted for 10 percent of property damage only crash costs, 21 percent of nonfatal injury crash costs, and 46 percent of fatal injury crash costs.

Drinking alcoholic beverages and using other drugs is widely accepted in our society. Drinking and other drug use is often portrayed as glamorous and sophisticated in the media. Yet the use of alcohol and other drugs can be very costly when combined with driving. Many collisions involve drivers who are under the influence of alcohol or other drugs; the costs include property damage, legal problems, injury and death.

All states now enforce a minimum drinking age of 21.

One Teen Dead, another Critical After Crash without Safety Belts

A 19-year-old driver is dead and his 15-year-old passenger is hospitalized in serious condition with internal injuries after a one-car crash in which the driver lost control of the vehicle and hit a utility pole. Neither the driver nor the passenger was wearing a seatbelt.

Source: Chronicle-Tribune.com♦

Lessons Learned

Motor vehicle travel is the primary means of transportation in the United States, providing an unprecedented degree of mobility. Yet for all its advantages, deaths and injuries resulting from motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for persons of every age from two to 33 years old. For those aged 34 to 65, motor vehicle crashes are the third leading cause of death. Traffic fatalities account for more than 95 percent of transportation-related fatalities.

In 2004, the fatality rate was 1.46 persons killed on the roads for every 100 million miles driven. The fatality rate has decreased slightly but steadily over the past seven years. The total number of persons killed decreased very slightly in 2004 - 42,636 lost their lives, compared to 42,643 in 2003. In 2004, one person died in a motor vehicle collision every twelve minutes. Someone was injured every eleven seconds. An 80% safety belt use nationwide, combined with a reduction in the rate of alcohol involvement in crashes, contributed to this lower fatality rate. However, much remains to be done.

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

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At the moment of impact in a crash, 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. Rear-seat passengers often hit people in the front seat of the vehicle as they fly forward. For this reason, you should insist that all passengers in your vehicle wear their safety belts.

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.

The NHTSA (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration) recommends that new buyers sit in a vehicle, put on the safety belts, and check the fit. Even with safety belt extenders that increase the length of the safety belt, some belts may not fit properly. If this is the case, you should find a vehicle with safety belts that do fit properly.

Remember: Even the highest rated vehicle can roll over. By wearing your safety belt you can reduce your chance of being killed in a rollover by about 75 percent.

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

Texting Believed to be Factor in Teens' Fatal Crash

Five high school cheerleaders died in a head-on crash with a fiery tractor-trailer and it was later determined that the cause may have been distraction due to text messages being sent from the driver's cell phone seconds before the crash took place.

Source: ABCNews.go.com♦

Lessons Learned

According to Thomas Dingus, director of the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute, which monitored 241 drivers ages 18 to 73 in its "100-Car Study" around Washington, D.C., teenage drivers are on the verge of "an impairment epidemic." Roughly 40 of those drivers were teens, and their impairment is due to the great number of distractions in automobiles and trucks, and from drowsy driving, said Dingus and project manager Sheila "Charlie" Klauer.

"It's to be expected," Klauer said. "First of all, I don't think their judgment is anywhere near as good as they think and I think they are prone to use the cell phones and (to) text message their friends (more) than older drivers."

Teens love technology - from cell phones to mp3 music players to dashboard maps that talk to drivers – that is becoming increasingly sophisticated and ever-present in automobiles and trucks. When you consider that research shows teens are particularly vulnerable to distraction and tend to think of themselves as both invincible and skillful multi-taskers, that is a frightening mix.

"What we've seen and continue to see is that teen drivers engage in a lot of different types of tasks while driving," said Dingus. "The problem is they're not very good at judging risk. They tend to use (the devices) in driving situations when they shouldn't," he added.

Dingus suggests a nationwide ban on all handheld devices - not just cell phones - for all drivers under 18. Klauer supports the idea.

"All of these things need to be banned," Klauer said. "Teens haven't fully learned to recognize hazardous driving situations and the only way they're going to learn it is without wireless devices."

Four states have made it illegal to drive and talk on a cell phone without a hands-free device. But so far, only Washington State has enacted a law banning text messaging while driving.

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.

Text messaging may be one of the most dangerous distractions for any driver.

"Clearly, the problem with texting is the same portion of your mind that you need to be using when you're focusing on the road is the same portion that you're using when you're texting," said Michael Pina of AAA.

For young, inexperienced drivers, texting could be even more dangerous. And yet, 46 percent of teens in a new AAA/Seventeen magazine survey admitted to texting while driving. Fifty-one percent said they talk on cell phones while driving, another distraction.

Experts agree that because of their lack of driving experience, distractions posed by cell phones, digital music players and other gadgets is a serious problem among teen drivers.

Many auto manufacturers are addressing these concerns by moving toward voice-activation devices, including next-generation technology that will let drivers download music and access songs by employing voice commands.

Dingus encourages the shift. Klauer believes that the voice-activated technology will improve safety, but, she said, "the technology is not perfect and it's got a ways to go before it's going to reduce drivers' 'eyes-off-road time' in any significant way."

Klauer and other experts contend what a driver is thinking about is nearly as important as where he is looking; therefore, a driver remains distracted despite hands-free technology. Eliminating device fiddling is insufficient, they say.

"I still think people need to be smart about it," Klauer said. "There are points in time when they're just going to have to drive and do nothing else."

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