

Safe Driving Teen Monthly Bulletin

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Teen Killed in Three-Vehicle Crash in Rainy Weather

A 17-year-old Mississippi girl was killed and three others were injured in a three-vehicle crash after the 17-year-old driver of a car pulled onto the shoulder in the rain, then pulled back on the road and hit a truck, spinning it 180 degrees. The car then spun and was hit on the passenger side by another truck.

Source: *ClarionLedger.com* ♦

Lessons Learned

Experienced drivers know that even just a thin coating of rain, snow or ice makes roads slippery. And wet leaves can be especially slippery and hazardous. You can improve your driving safety by slowing down under these conditions and by increasing your following distance. Be extra careful on curves, turns and expressway ramps.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 Teen Killed in Three-Vehicle Crash in Rainy Weather
- 2 Alcohol, Speed Factors in Teen's Fatal Car Crash
- 3 Teen Bicyclist Injured After Colliding with Vehicle
- 4 Drowsy Driving Believed to be Cause of Teens' Fatal Crash



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In heavy rain, your vehicle's tires may begin to actually ride on the water lying on top of the road pavement. This "hydroplaning" can cause complete loss of traction and steering control. Hydroplaning usually occurs at higher speeds, but it also can occur if your vehicle's tires are tread-worn or improperly inflated. When there is heavy rain, it is almost always wise to drive more slowly. If your vehicle begins losing traction, slow down even more. Good tires with deep tread help prevent hydroplaning.

Rain, fog, or snow makes it harder to see out through your vehicle's windshield, and difficult for other drivers to see you. In most states, the law requires you to turn on your vehicle's headlights whenever the weather conditions would ordinarily require the use of windshield wipers to clear rain, snow, sleet, and other precipitation. "Daytime running lights" do not usually qualify as headlights. If your windshield wipers cause streaks or smears, the blades must be replaced.

High headlight beams reflect off rain, fog and falling snow. This makes it even harder for you to see where you are going. For better visibility during these weather conditions, keep your vehicle's headlights on low beam. Reduce your speed. Signal your turns further ahead of time than usual to give other drivers and roadway users increased warning. Brake early when slowing behind another vehicle or coming to an intersection stop.

Some vehicles have front fog lights, or front and rear fog lights, for use when heavy fog or similar hazardous weather conditions seriously restrict the driver's visibility.

Alcohol, Speed Factors in Teen's Fatal Car Crash

An 18-year-old man died as a result of injuries he sustained in a single-vehicle crash in which, traveling at a high rate of speed, he missed a curve and collided with a school bus stop, tree and fence. The Oklahoma Highway Patrol said that alcohol was involved in the crash.

Source: *SapulpaDailyHerald.com* ♦

Lessons Learned

Alcohol slows your reflexes and reaction time, reduces your ability to see clearly, distorts your judgment of speed and distances, often reduces your inhibitions from taking chances, and makes you less alert. The important physical and mental skills you need to drive safely are weakened.

Because your vision is already restricted at night, driving after drinking is especially dangerous after dark. In addition to its other effects, alcohol reduces your ability to recover from headlight glare. When another vehicle approaches, you can be blinded by its headlights for a dangerously long period of time.

You do not have to look or feel drunk for these things to happen. The effects of alcohol can begin long before you become intoxicated or even legally impaired and begin with the first drink.

As alcohol limits your physical ability to drive, it also makes you less aware of what is happening to your safe driving abilities. It becomes difficult for you to judge your own condition. You may actually feel more confident about driving, when you should not be driving at all.

During each mile you drive, you literally make hundreds of decisions. You turn those decisions into actions that keep your vehicle under control and keep you from getting into traffic crashes. Alcohol makes it hard to make correct decisions and to take the safest actions.

Blood alcohol content (BAC) is the percentage of alcohol in your blood and is usually determined by a chemical test of breath, blood or urine.

Your (BAC) primarily depends on:

- How much alcohol you drink.
- How much time passes between drinks.
- Your weight.

Your BAC *does not* depend on what *kind* of alcoholic beverage you drink, how physically fit you are, or how well you can "hold your liquor."

Different types of drinks do not affect you differently. It is the amount of alcohol you consume, not whether it is in beer, wine or wine cooler, or liquor, that raises your BAC and lowers your driving ability. These drinks contain about the same amount of alcohol - 1½ ounces of liquor, 5 ounces of wine, 12 ounces of beer, and 12 ounces of wine cooler. None is "safer to drink" than the others.

For a male weighing 150 pounds, each one of these drinks would contain enough alcohol to increase his BAC by about .02 percent. On average, it takes the human body about one hour to dispose of that much alcohol. However, studies suggest that a woman's body may process and remove alcohol from the blood more slowly than a man's. This may result in a higher BAC over a longer period of time.

Compared to the 150-pound male described above, your own body weight can make some difference in the BAC and the effects of alcohol. But no one is immune to the effects of alcohol. It is a simple fact: the more you drink in a given period of time, the higher your BAC will be, and the less safe your driving will be.

It takes only a few drinks to raise your BAC to levels at which it is illegal to drive. And remember, the effects of alcohol on your driving ability actually begin at even lower BAC levels after just one drink.

Eating before or while you drink helps slow down alcohol absorption somewhat, but it cannot prevent you from becoming impaired or intoxicated if you have too many drinks.



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Teen Bicyclist Injured After Colliding with Vehicle

A 13-year-old bicyclist was seriously injured when his bicycle collided with a car driven by a 19-year-old. Witnesses told police the bicyclist entered the intersection and struck the right front portion of the car.

Source: *UnionLeader.com* ♦

Lessons Learned

In 2004 in the United States, 725 bicyclists were killed in crashes with motor vehicles. Four states (California, Florida, New York, and Texas) accounted for 44 percent of bicycle deaths in the US in 2004. Bicycle deaths are most likely to occur in summer and fall. More deaths occur in urban areas (66%) than in rural areas. Thirty-three percent of deaths occurred at intersections. The peak time is 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Deaths are most likely to occur on Fridays. Seventy-nine percent of 2004 bicycle deaths were riders 16 years and older. Eighty-five percent of the bicyclists killed in 2004 weren't wearing helmets. Twenty-eight percent had a blood alcohol concentration of .08 or greater.

Bicyclists, in-line skaters, and operators of non-motorized scooters have the right to share the road and travel in the same direction as motor vehicles. Like pedestrians, these roadway users are often difficult to notice in traffic, and have little protection from a traffic crash.

When driving a motor vehicle, be sure to check your vehicle's "blind spots" before you parallel park, or open a driver's side door, or leave a curb. Don't rely only on your rearview mirrors - turn your head to look for bicyclists and in-line skaters that may be alongside or approaching.

When driving, approach bicyclists, in-line skaters, and non-motorized scooters with extreme caution. Give them room and slow down as you pass them. Air pressure from a quickly passing vehicle can throw them off balance.

Be aware that the bicyclist, in-line skater or non-motorized scooter near or in front of you may react to road hazards just as a motorcyclist would and suddenly change speed, direction, or lane position.

The rules of the road and right-of-way apply to, and protect, bicyclists, in-line skaters, and non-motorized scooters. You must yield the right-of-way to them just as you would to another vehicle.

Bicyclists and in-line skaters must obey the rules of the road, just as vehicle drivers do.

Bicyclists and in-line skaters must:

- Ride in a bicycle lane, if a usable one is available. Where there is none, the bicyclist must ride near the right curb or edge of the road, or on a usable right shoulder of the road, to avoid undue interference with other traffic. The rule of staying to the right does not apply when a bicyclist or in-line skater is preparing for a left turn or must move left to avoid hazards.
- Come to a full stop before entering a roadway from a driveway, alley or over a curb.
- Never travel with more than two abreast in a single lane.
- Never ride on a sidewalk if local laws prohibit it.
- Signal turns, lane changes and stops using hand signals. A bicyclist may signal a right turn by extending the right arm straight out to the right, instead of using the standard signal for car drivers.
- Never carry a passenger unless the bicycle has a passenger seat. Child passengers must ride in securely attached bicycle safety seats.
- Keep at least one hand on the handlebars at all times, and not carry anything which interferes with proper control of the bicycle.

When sharing the road with a bicyclist:

- Allow plenty of clearance when passing, and reduce your speed if the roadway is narrow.
- After parallel parking, check for bicyclists before opening a street-side door.
- At night, avoid using high beam headlights when a cyclist is approaching. The cyclist could be temporarily blinded.
- Do not follow a cyclist closely. If you are too close and the cyclist must lay their bike down on the road in an emergency, you could run them over.



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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.

Drowsy Driving Believed to be Cause of Teens' Fatal Crash

An 18-year-old passenger was killed, a 15-year-old passenger was injured, and the 18-year-old driver of the vehicle that went off the highway was injured in a crash that the dead teen's father believes was caused by the driver falling asleep at the wheel.

Source: GJSentinel.com ♦

Lessons Learned

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.

Sleeping and driving do not mix. When you are behind the wheel of a car, being fatigued is dangerous. Drivers who are tired have slower reaction times, decreased awareness, and impaired judgment. As with drugs and alcohol, drowsiness can contribute to a traffic crash.

Researchers have found the following symptoms to be associated with drowsy driving:

- Your eyes close or go out of focus by themselves.
- You have trouble keeping your head up.
- You cannot stop yawning.
- You have wandering disconnected thoughts.
- You do not remember driving the last few miles.
- You drift between lanes, tailgate, or miss traffic signs.
- You keep jerking the car back into the lane.
- You have drifted off the road and hit the rumble strips which produce a loud noise and vibrations.

Who is Most at Risk? All Drivers Who Are:

- Driving long distances without rest breaks.

- Sleep-deprived or fatigued.
- Driving through the night, the early afternoon, or at other times when you are normally asleep.
- Taking medication that increases sleepiness or drinking alcohol.
- Driving alone.
- Driving on long, rural, boring roads.
- Frequent travelers, e.g., business travelers and long-distance commuters.
- Young People — Sleep related crashes are most common in young people, who tend to stay up late, sleep too little, and drive at night.
- Shift Workers — Studies suggest individuals with non-traditional work schedules have a greater risk of being involved in a fatigue-related driving traffic crash.
- People with Undiagnosed Sleep Disorders — If you find you are regularly tired during the day, you may have a sleep disorder and should seek medical help.

Effective Countermeasures:

Before you embark on a trip, you should:

- Get a good night's sleep.
- Plan to drive long trips with a companion.
- Schedule regular stops, every 100 miles or 2 hours.
- Avoid alcohol and medications (over-the-counter and prescribed) that may impair performance. Check with your doctor or pharmacist about any medication you are taking. Alcohol interacts with fatigue; increasing its effects.

Once driving, you should:

- Recognize when you are in danger of falling asleep and that you cannot predict when sleep may occur.
- Not count on the radio, open window or other "tricks" to keep you awake.
- Respond to symptoms of fatigue by finding a safe place to stop for a break.
- Pull off into a safe area from traffic and take a brief nap (15 to 45 minutes).

Do not drive for at least 15 minutes after waking from sleep.