

Safe Driving Teen Monthly Bulletin

Volume 78, Issue 40

November 2007

Teen Seriously Injured in Rollover Crash

A 17-year-old Wisconsin girl was hospitalized with head injuries after a rollover crash that started when the driver, her 16-year-old boyfriend, reached for a soda. The car drifted into a ditch, then struck a boulder and flipped, landing on another boulder in a farm field.

Source: *JournalTimes.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:

- 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.

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Published by the National Safety Commission
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- 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 6:00a.m. More than one-third of drivers who nodded off while driving within the past six months say their last experience occurred between 6:00a.m. and 5:00p.m.
- Dealing with children: Nearly one in four 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 report eating or drinking at least occasionally while driving, with 14% doing so on three-quarters or more of their driving trips.
- 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 your emotions, poor judgment, or distractions to interfere with your driving.

Teen Dies When Ejected from Vehicle in One-Car Crash

A 19-year-old woman died after she was thrown from the vehicle in which she was a passenger. The 20-year-old male driver, who was treated for facial cuts, was arrested for underage drinking.

Source: *Philly.com* ♦

Lessons Learned

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. In 2002, an estimated 917 lives were saved due to minimum drinking age laws. In recent years, the rate of alcohol-related vehicle fatalities has declined. But alcohol-related crashes are still a top safety problem.

The effects of alcohol use vary from person to person even when the amount of alcohol used is equal. Though the effects and severity effects vary from person to person, alcohol affects everyone who uses it. The demands of the driving task are so great that every driver should be in the best condition possible. A driver cannot afford to increase the risks associated with driving by having his or her skills reduced by alcohol. Even the best drivers are affected if they drink alcohol.

Everyone needs to know how alcohol affects the mental and physical abilities required for safe driving. Even non-drinkers will interact with impaired drivers on the road. Signs of impaired driving to watch for include:

- driving too fast or too slow
- drifting in and out of a lane or straddling lanes
- driving without headlights on at night
- stopping for no apparent reason
- tailgating other drivers
- using the turn signal inconsistently and/or

making abrupt turns

If you see someone driving erratically, increase your following distance and stay a safe distance away from the vehicle. Always wear your seat belt and make sure your passengers wear their seat belts.

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.



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Teen Who Fell Asleep at Wheel Arrested for Causing Death in Crash

An 18-year-old man was charged with operation of a vehicle causing death of another person after a July crash. The teen fell asleep at the wheel and caused a crash that killed a bicyclist who had stopped to repair a broken bicycle chain on the side of the highway.

Source: delmaranow.com ♦

Lessons Learned

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) conservatively estimates that 100,000 police-reported crashes are the direct result of driver fatigue each year. This results in an estimated 1,550 deaths, 71,000 injuries and \$12.5 billion in monetary losses.

A typical crash related to sleepiness has the following characteristics:

- Occurs during late night/early morning or late afternoon
- Is a single-vehicle crash
- Occurs on a high-speed road
- Driver does not attempt to avoid the crash
- Driver is alone in the vehicle

There are many underlying causes of sleepiness, including:

- too little sleep
- interrupted or fragmented sleep
- chronic sleep debt (for example, new parents or a person working two jobs)
- circadian factors associated with work schedules (for example, those who work at night)
- undiagnosed or untreated sleep disorders
- use of sedating medications
- consumption of alcohol when already tired

These factors have cumulative effects and a combination of any of these can greatly increase one's risk for a fatigue-related crash. The only way to reduce sleepiness is to sleep.

Being fatigued while driving can cause:

- Impaired reaction time, judgment and vision

- Problems with information processing and short-term memory
- Decreased performance, vigilance and motivation
- Increased moodiness and aggressive behaviors

Before hitting the road:

- Get a good night's sleep. While this varies from individual to individual, sleep experts recommend between 7-9 hours of sleep per night.
- Plan to drive long trips with a companion. Passengers can help look for early warning signs of fatigue or switch drivers when needed. Passengers should stay awake to talk to the driver.
- Schedule regular stops every 100 miles or 2 hours. When you stop, stretch or take a short walk.
- Avoid alcohol and medications (over-the-counter and prescribed) that may impair performance. Alcohol interacts with fatigue, increasing its effects.
- Consult your physician or a local sleep disorders center for diagnosis and treatment if you suffer frequent daytime sleepiness, have difficulty sleeping at night often, and/or snore loudly every night.

Signs that tell you to stop and rest:

- Difficulty focusing, frequent blinking, or heavy eyelids
- Daydreaming; wandering/disconnected thoughts
- Trouble remembering the last few miles driven; missing exits or traffic signs
- Yawning repeatedly or rubbing your eyes
- Trouble keeping your head up
- Drifting from your lane, tailgating, or hitting a shoulder rumble strip
- Feeling restless and irritable

Remember – the only cure for sleepiness is sleep.



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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.

Worn Tires Cause Death of Teen in Crash

Worn tires that were ineffective in rainy weather likely caused the death of a 17-year-old boy in a single-vehicle crash. The car ran off the road and struck a tree.

Source: NewsLeader.com ♦

Lessons Learned

Your vehicle is an important factor when considering stopping distance. Vehicles must have brakes that meet certain standards. If the brakes on one side of your vehicle are worn or out of adjustment, your vehicle will pull to one side when you stop, making it difficult to stay in control. An anti-lock braking system affects the manner in which you must use the brakes to stop effectively. Under-inflated tires or tires with worn tread will negatively affect braking distance.

Road and weather conditions must also be considered. Friction is required to stop your vehicle. Wet roads have less friction than dry roads, so it will take longer to stop on wet roads, and even longer to stop on icy roads.

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. The law requires the tread on tires to meet certain standards, but if the tread on your tires is worn, your vehicle is more likely to hydroplane. Your vehicle can hydroplane in as little as 1/16 of an inch of water. Besides slowing down, you can also reduce your chances of hydroplaning by making sure your tires have the right air pressure and good tread. If your vehicle hydroplanes, ease your foot off the gas and allow your vehicle to slow down until your tires gain traction with the road.

If your vehicle skids, you need to respond quickly and calmly. A vehicle will skid when the tires lose their grip on the pavement. Slippery surfaces combined with sudden movement may cause you to skid. High speed, especially on curves, may also lead to skidding. When you feel your vehicle begin to skid, take your foot off the gas pedal. Do not use your brakes unless you are about to hit something. Steer the car into the direction of the skid to straighten the vehicle out. Then steer in the direction

you wish to go. Straighten the steering wheel as soon as you are going in the correct direction. If you do not straighten in time, the car will begin to skid in the opposite direction. Begin to correct your steering as soon as you go into the skid. The longer you wait, the more difficult it will be to get out of the skid. All of your steering movements must be quick but smooth. Once you are going straight again, you may begin to accelerate slowly.

Tire inspections should be performed monthly. Finding small problems, such as a nail in a tire, before they turn into bigger problems can save you time, money, and irritation. Tires affect your vehicle handling, ride, braking and safety. For peak performance, tires must have the correct air pressure, tread depth, balance and the vehicle must have the correct wheel alignment. Properly trained and equipped service personnel should perform some tire maintenance, including puncture repairs, tire replacement (mounting on the rim), tire rotation and balancing, and wheel alignment.

The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration points out that studies of tire safety show that maintaining proper tire pressure, observing tire and vehicle load limits (not carrying more weight in your vehicle than your tires or vehicle can safely handle), avoiding road hazards, and inspecting tires for cuts, slashes, and other irregularities are the most important things you can do to avoid tire failure, such as tread separation or blowout and flat tires. These actions, along with other care and maintenance activities, can also:

- Improve vehicle handling
- Help protect you and others from avoidable breakdowns and accidents
- Improve fuel economy
- Increase the life of your tires.

When a front tire blows out, the car pulls strongly in the direction of the deflated tire. You must steer firmly against the pull of the car to keep the car on its intended path. A left front tire is especially dangerous, because the car might pull left toward the lane of oncoming traffic. When a rear tire blows out, the back of the car can fishtail. Handle a rear blowout like a skid. Grip the steering wheel firmly and ease up on the accelerator. Do not use the brakes until the vehicle is under control. Then, apply the brakes gently. Steer the vehicle in the direction you want the front end to go and coast to a safe location.