

# Safe Driving Teen Monthly Bulletin

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## Teen Sentenced to Prison for Fatal Car Crash

A 19-year-old man was sentenced to 1½ to 4½ years in prison for being the driver in a crash that killed another 19-year-old man. The crash, which resulted in charges for the driver of vehicular manslaughter, criminally negligent homicide, and driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs, occurred after an after-prom party in May, 2007.

Source: [MidHudsonNews.com](http://MidHudsonNews.com) ♦

## Lessons Learned

Drinking alcoholic beverages and other drug use is widely accepted in our society. Advertisers often portray drinking as glamorous and sophisticated. Yet the abuse of drugs, including alcohol, is costly. It takes its toll in broken relationships, poor health, wasted lives and sometimes death.

This problem is greatly compounded when someone who drinks alcohol or uses other drugs also drives. A

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great number of collisions involve drivers who use alcohol and/or other drugs

Many people who use alcohol do not realize that it is a drug. The word alcohol is the commonly used term for the chemical substance ethanol, grain alcohol, or ethyl alcohol.

The effects of alcohol vary from person to person. Equal amounts of alcohol affect different people in different ways. Even though the severity of its effects vary, alcohol affects everyone who uses it. One of the most serious problems of alcohol is that of the drinking driver. The demands of the driving task are so great that every driver needs to be in the best condition possible. A person cannot afford to increase the risk of driving by having his or her skills reduced by alcohol.

Everyone needs to know how alcohol affects the mental and physical abilities needed for safe driving. Even non-drinkers will interact with impaired drivers on the roadway. Everyone who drives needs to know the importance of non-drinking.

A driver affected by alcohol has a decreased ability to reason clearly and to make sound judgments. However, the driver may feel as though thinking and judging abilities are sharper and quicker than usual. Some people have a false sense of confidence after they have a drink or two. For example, some people think they can dance or even play pool better after a few drinks. There is nothing a person can do better after having a drink than she or he could do before having the drink. Drinking does not increase your ability to do anything better than you could before.

## Teens Critically Injured in Crash with Train

Two teens are in critical condition after apparently trying to beat a train at a railroad crossing. The teens had to be extricated from the vehicle, which was destroyed in the collision.

Source: *mlive.com* ♦

## Lessons Learned

There is a regulation in baseball which says that if the ball and the runner reach first base at the same time, the tie goes to the runner. In traffic, if a train and a car get to a crossing at the same time, the tie goes to the train. With this understanding, let's look at some ways to keep from having a fatal tie at a railway crossing.

Railroad crossings are a type of intersection, and like highway intersections, they can be very dangerous. Railroad crossings have their own unique markings; you will see examples at the end of this section.

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 railroad crossing does not have red lights or a crossing gate. However, like controlled crossings, uncontrolled crossings are 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 may have a stop sign. If this is the case, the same laws apply as at a highway intersection.

When you approach a crossing, slow down and check traffic in the rear. Be aware of other cars approaching you at an unsafe speed. Reduce the noise level in your car to listen for the train sounds by turning the volume on your radio all the way down. If necessary, lower your window.

Stop at a safe distance before the tracks if a train is approaching. 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 crossing.

When crossing the railroad tracks, reduce your speed to handle a potential rough ride. Check both ways on the track for a short sight distance. Drive onto the tracks only when you have enough space and speed to clear the tracks. Make sure any vehicles ahead of you have cleared the tracks before you start to cross. Never stop on railroad tracks waiting for traffic ahead to move.

Be prepared to stop behind large vehicles, such as school buses and trucks hauling flammable contents. The law often requires such vehicles to stop at all railroad crossings.

Round black-on-yellow warning signs are placed ahead of public highway-rail intersections. The Advance Warning sign tells you to slow down, look and listen for a train, and be prepared to stop if a train is coming.

Pavement markings have the same meaning as Advance Warning signs. They consist of an X with the letters RR and the no-passing marking on two lane roads.

There may also be a NO PASSING ZONE sign on two-lane roads at railroad crossings.

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.



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## Wet Roads Contribute to Fatal Crash

Police say wet weather and driving too fast for conditions contributed to the crash that killed an 18-year-old man. Though he was only driving 40 mph, the teen's vehicle spun out of control and hit a wall when he tried to take a curve in the road.

Source: *sltrib.com* ♦

## Lessons Learned

The faster we drive, the further it will take us to stop. Several things must be considered to determine stopping distance.

Road and weather conditions must be considered. Friction is the most important factor in stopping a vehicle. Conditions such as wet roads or roads made of gravel reduce traction and increase stopping distance.

When you are forced to stop, three things must happen. You must perceive the hazard or warning; you must react to the hazard; and you must use your brakes to stop.

Once you know a hazard exists, the length of time you take to execute your actions is your reaction time. An average driver's reaction time is  $\frac{3}{4}$  of one second in clinical laboratory settings, but reaction time in the driving environment is an average of 1.5 seconds.

The distance your vehicle travels from the time you apply the brakes until your vehicle stops is called braking distance. This distance will change depending on your driving abilities, your vehicle's condition, and the conditions of the road.

Don't forget - the higher the speed, the longer the braking distance. At higher speeds, you will have a harder time controlling your vehicle. A vehicle with worn tires or bad brakes needs a longer distance to stop. Check your tires frequently for low air or worn tread. If the brakes on one side of your car are worn or out of adjustment, your vehicle may pull to one side in a stop – if this happens, get the brakes checked immediately.

If you panic and slam on your brakes you might lose control of your car in an emergency situation. Be alert at all times, but stay calm in an emergency. Remember, wet road surfaces will reduce traction on the road and increase your braking distance. Reduce your speed if it begins to rain during your drive.

When the roads are wet, stopping distance is increased. When braking, friction between your tires and the surface of the roadway affects your stopping distance. Wet roads have less friction and increase the distance it takes you to stop. Also, driving through water may cause hydroplaning. The tread on a tire prevents hydroplaning which is one reason the law requires tire treads to meet certain standards. As little as 1/16 of one inch of water can cause hydroplaning.

Hydroplaning occurs when your tires ride on a thin layer of water and do not touch the road. When the car is riding on a film of water, there is no friction between your tires and the road. Hydroplaning also affects your ability to steer and brake.

If your vehicle skids, respond quickly and calmly. A vehicle skids when the tires lose their grip on the pavement. Slippery surfaces combined with a sudden movement may cause your vehicle 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 and do not use your brakes, unless you are about to hit something. Steer into the direction of the skid to straighten the vehicle out. Be prepared to countersteer, if necessary, to straighten the vehicle out, but take care not to overcorrect. 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 vehicle 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 harder it will be to come 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.

Tires are very important in having a safe trip. Remember that only a small portion of the tire is used to make the vehicle stop and turn. It is your only contact with the road. It is important to maintain proper air pressure. Too little air even in one tire can make a vehicle difficult to control. Tread on a tire helps to keep traction, which means control and the ability to stop on a wet surface.



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## Teen Injured in Drowsy Driving Crash

An 18-year-old man was hospitalized for injuries he suffered after the vehicle he was driving crossed the center line and hit a tree. The police report states that he may have fallen asleep before the crash occurred.

Source: *News-Gazette.com* ♦

## Lessons Learned

NHTSA data indicates that in recent years there have been about 56,000 crashes in the US annually in which driver drowsiness or fatigue was cited by the police. Annually, an average of roughly 40,000 nonfatal injuries and 1,550 fatalities resulted from these crashes. Sleep is a neurobiological need with predictable sleepiness and wakefulness.

The loss of one night's sleep can lead to extreme-term sleepiness, while habitually restricting sleep by 1 to 2 hours a night can lead to chronic sleepiness. Sleeping is the only way to reduce sleepiness. Sleepiness causes auto crashes because it impairs performance and it can ultimately lead to the inability to resist falling asleep at the wheel. Critical aspects of driving impairment associated with sleepiness are reaction time, vigilance, attention and information processing.

Unlike the situation with alcohol-related crashes, no blood, breath or other measurable test is currently available to quantify level of sleepiness at the crash site. Although current understanding largely comes from inferential evidence, a typical crash related to sleepiness has the following characteristics:

- The problem occurs during late night/early morning or late afternoon.
- The crash is likely to be serious.
- The crash involves a single vehicle on the roadway.
- The crash occurs on a high-speed road.
- The driver does not attempt to avoid the crash.
- The driver is alone in the vehicle.

Although evidence is limited or inferential, certain chronic, predisposing factors and acute situational factors are recognized as increasing the risk of drowsy driving and related crashes. These factors

include:

- Sleep loss.
- Driving patterns, including driving between midnight and 6 a.m.
- Driving a substantial number of miles each year and/or a substantial number of hours each day.
- Driving in the late afternoon hours and driving for longer times without taking a break.
- Use of sedating medications, especially prescribed anxiolytic, tricyclic antidepressants and some antihistamines.
- Consumption of alcohol, which interacts with and adds to drowsiness.

Helpful behaviors include:

- Plan to get sufficient sleep.
- Do not drink even small amounts of alcohol when sleepy.
- Limit driving between midnight and 6 a.m.
- As soon as you become sleepy, stop.
- Take a short nap (15 to 20 minutes).
- Let a passenger drive.

Night driving means there will be changes that you must deal with successfully. Aside from reducing detail, darkness conceals hazards: pedestrians, bicycles, stalled cars, curves and other objects or conditions. You must make a decision on the basis of a sketchy and incomplete picture.

At night, 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. Light does not bend around corners, so you must reduce your speed on curves to a point where your headlights illuminate the road ahead. Usually, adequate highway lighting is limited. Glare from roadside lighting and the headlights of oncoming vehicles may impair your visibility.

Keep your panel lights as dim as possible for better vision, while using enough panel light to read your speedometer and other gauges. Reduce speed as much as is necessary to stop within the visible distance. Increase seeing distance by keeping the headlights clean and properly aimed and the windshield clean.