

Safe Driving Teen Monthly Bulletin

Volume 88, Issue 50

September 2008

Teen Dies from Car Crash Injuries

A 17-year-old girl was killed in a single-vehicle accident after her car drifted off the road and hit an oak tree. Police say the teen may not have been wearing her seat belt correctly.

Source: NapaValleyRegister.com ♦

Lessons Learned

In 24 of the states with belt use laws in 2005, the law specified secondary enforcement. That is, police officers are permitted to write a citation only after a vehicle is stopped for some other traffic infraction.

As of December 2005, 49 states and the District of Columbia had belt use laws in effect. The laws differ from state to state, according to the type and age of the vehicle, occupant seating position, etc.

In 2005; 31,415 occupants of passenger vehicles (cars, light trucks, vans, and utility vehicles) were killed in

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Published by the National Safety Commission
for Teens and their Parents



motor vehicle traffic crashes. This represents 72 percent of the 43,443 traffic fatalities reported for the year.

Among passenger vehicle occupants over 4 years old, safety belts saved an estimated 15,632 lives in 2005.

Ejection from the vehicle is one of the most injurious events that can happen to a person in a crash. In fatal crashes in 2005, 75% of passenger car occupants who were totally ejected from the vehicle were killed. Safety belts are effective in preventing total ejections. Only 1% of the occupants reported to have been using restraints were totally ejected, compared with 30% of the unrestrained occupants. The facts speak for themselves. Whether you are going twenty miles per hour or seventy miles per hour, you are a lot better off wearing your safety belt.

Wear lap belts around your hips, not your stomach. Fasten them snugly. Wear a shoulder belt only with a lap belt.

The 1999 NHTSA study, Crash Outcome Data Evaluation System (CODES), linked traffic and medical records in seven states to assess total costs of injury from motor vehicle crashes. The study found that the average inpatient costs for crash victims who were not using safety belts were 55 percent higher than for those who were belted (most current data available).

Airbags, combined with lap/shoulder safety belts, offer the most effective safety protection available today for passenger vehicle occupants. Lap/shoulder belts should always be used, even in a vehicle with an airbag.

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Teens Killed in Fiery Crash had High BACs

A 16-year-old boy and a 15-year-old boy who died in a fiery crash after their car crashed into a tree had BACs of 0.12 and 0.08, respectively. The 16-year-old was driving.

Source: *KBTX.com* ♦

Lessons Learned

Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) is the amount of alcohol in an individual's body, measured by the weight of the alcohol in a volume of blood. The BAC determines the amount of alcohol that can be consumed before an individual is presumptively impaired.

There are several ways to test an individual's BAC. The most common method used by law enforcement officers is the breath-testing device, which measures the alcohol level in the breath from the lungs. BAC can also be determined by drawing blood and measuring the amount of alcohol in the blood itself.

Blood alcohol concentration is directly correlated with the degree of impairment an individual displays when driving after drinking. Although an individual may not exhibit gross signs of impairment, he or she is nevertheless impaired, even at a BAC level lower than that allowed by most state laws.

There is no formula to determine BAC solely from the amount of alcoholic beverages consumed. BAC levels vary from person to person, and can vary within an individual on a case-by-case basis. An individual's BAC depends on the person's gender, weight, metabolism, the time period over which the alcohol was consumed, and the amount of food that was in the stomach prior to drinking. Although a person's BAC can be estimated, the level cannot be determined solely by the number of drinks consumed, and cannot be precisely calculated by a person's height and weight.

Blood alcohol concentration laws are different for drivers under the age of 21 because it is already illegal for these individuals to buy, possess or consume alcoholic beverages. Zero tolerance laws make it illegal for those under the age of 21 to drive after consuming any amount of alcohol, so the legal limit for these drivers is .02.

Presumption of impairment is .08 BAC. The reason for such a presumption is that everybody reacts to alcohol differently. Individuals can be the same sex, height, and weight, and drink the same amount of alcohol, and

one individual can be visibly far more impaired than the other.

An estimated 254,000 persons were injured in the US in 2005 in crashes where police reported that alcohol was present - an average of one person injured approximately every two minutes.

Of the 16,885 people who died in alcohol-related crashes in 2005, 14,539 (86%) were killed in crashes where at least one driver or nonoccupant had a BAC of .08 g/dL or higher. Of the 14,539 people killed in such crashes, 71 percent were drivers or nonoccupants with BAC levels at or above .08 g/dL. The remaining 29 percent were drivers or nonoccupants with either no BAC or BAC below .08 g/dL, or were passengers.

More than one-third (34 percent) of all pedestrians 16 years of age or older killed in traffic crashes in 2005 had BAC levels .08 g/dL or higher. By age group, the percentages ranged from a low of nine percent for pedestrians 65 and older to a high of 46 percent for those 21 to 24 years old.

About 90% of the alcohol a person drinks will be oxidized by the liver, which takes time. One to five percent of the alcohol is given off unchanged in urine, perspiration, and expired air. (The expired air is used by the police to measure your BAC.) The remainder of the alcohol in the blood is oxidized or burned up by various organs of the body. Each drink increases the number of liver cells destroyed and eventually may cause cirrhosis of the liver. This disease is eight times more frequent among alcoholics than non-alcoholics.



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Failure to Yield Right-of-Way Results in Deadly Crash

A 17-year-old boy was killed after his vehicle hit another teen's car when he pulled out of a parking lot. Police say it appears that the other teen driver had the right-of-way.

Source: *CandGNews.com* ♦

Lessons Learned

The law does not give the right-of-way to anyone; it only says who must yield the right-of way. Every driver, motorcyclist, moped rider, bicyclist and pedestrian must do everything possible to avoid a crash. When must you yield the right of way? Every driver of a vehicle shall yield the right-of-way to:

- A pedestrian worker and flagperson engaged in maintenance or construction work on a highway when lawfully notified by a warning device of that person.
- An escort vehicle or pedestrian flagperson that is engaged in the management of highway movement of an oversize vehicle, when the driver is warned of the presence of the vehicle or person.
- A publicly-owned transit bus traveling in the same direction which has signaled and is re-entering the traffic flow from a specifically designated pullout bay.
- A vehicle which has entered the intersection from a different highway.
- All vehicles approaching on a state-maintained highway when you are about to enter or cross the state-maintained road from a paved or unpaved road that is not controlled by a traffic control device.
- All vehicles approaching on a paved county or city maintained road from an unpaved road that is not controlled by a traffic control device.
- Any vehicle approaching from the opposite direction which is within the intersection or so close thereto as to constitute an immediate hazard when turning to the left within the intersection or into an alley, private road, or driveway.

In addition, the driver on the left shall yield to the vehicle on the right when both vehicles have entered an intersection from different highways at the same time.

Every vehicle must yield the right-of-way at intersections that are controlled by stop signs, yield signs and traffic signals or as directed by a police officer.

Once you have identified a situation and predicted a possible conflict, you must then decide what action you will take to avoid the conflict. There is probably no task more important for a driver than making wise decisions in time to avoid conflict. There may be times when you fail to identify every clue in a situation. Other drivers may take actions you did not predict. The decisions you make in these situations become the basic factors for your safe driving. Be prepared to change your plans to avoid conflict. Your own speed and the speed of other drivers will influence any decision you make. Many drivers think that slowing down is the only way to avoid a conflict, but it is not. A quick maneuver may also be required. But if you haven't practiced quick maneuvers in your mind ahead of time, you may make a panic stop when you perceive a conflict.

You can decide to change your position within your lane or change lanes to the left or right. You should have an escape path to use in order to avoid conflict. If possible, you should have available space all around your vehicle. Reposition your vehicle to increase the space around your vehicle if necessary.

The decision to communicate with others helps reduce the chance of a conflict. You may use your lights to give signals to other drivers. Using your brake lights signals other drivers that you are slowing down and/or intend to stop. Using your turn signals tells others that you plan to turn or change lanes. Your emergency flashers convey the message that you are in trouble or cannot move. White back-up lights let other drivers know that you are backing up or intend to back up. Look for back-up lights on cars in parking lots to indicate a possible conflict. Parking lights tell other drivers that you are parked along the side of the roadway. Try to develop eye contact with other drivers. You can communicate many messages via eye contact. Even if the other driver appears to be looking at you, she or he may not take action to avoid conflict. Always be ready to yield the right-of-way.



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Teen Killed in Rollover Crash after Failing to Navigate Curve

A 16-year-old girl was killed in a late-night, single-car crash after she failed to negotiate a curve. The vehicle overturned and came to rest on its top.

Source: *ArkansasMatters.com* ♦

Lessons Learned

The way that the road you are traveling on is structured is important to watch. Identify intersections, hills and curves early. Watch for signs that may indicate that the road ahead is changing. For example, a sign might tell you that the road ahead will narrow. Multi-lane roadways often narrow into single-lane roadways. Identify signs warning you of this change early enough to position your vehicle in the through lane. Always try to avoid making any unnecessary stops in moving traffic. Identify the roadway surfaces and conditions each time you begin to drive. If the weather changes while you are driving, roadway surfaces may change. For example, if it is sunny when you start out but begins raining during your drive, you must change your driving behavior to accommodate the slippery road surface.

Night driving requires adjustments too. The lack of light reduces detail and conceals hazards such as pedestrians, bicycles, stalled cars, and curves. 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. Headlights do not bend around corners; they will only illuminate what is directly in front of you. Highway lighting may be limited. Glare from roadway lights, business signs, and the headlights of oncoming vehicles may impair your visibility. Follow these tips for safer night driving:

- Keep your panel lights dim for better vision, but make sure panel lights are bright enough to read your speedometer and other gauges.
- Turn your headlights on at twilight. Even if you don't need them to see the road, they will help other drivers to see you.
- Low-beam headlights are only effective for speeds up to 20-25 mph. You must use special care when driving faster than these speeds, since you are unable to detect pedestrians, bicyclists and others.

- High-beam headlights can reveal objects up to a distance of at least 450 feet and are most effective for speeds faster than 25 mph.
- Reduce your speed so you can stop within the distance illuminated by your headlights.
- Increase your seeing distance by keeping the headlights clean and properly aimed.
- When following another vehicle or when an oncoming vehicle approaches you, switch your headlights to low beams so you don't blind the driver.
- If a vehicle comes toward you with high beams on, flash your lights to high beam and back to low beam once. Don't look directly at oncoming headlights. Instead, watch the right edge of your lane. Look quickly to be sure of the other vehicle's position every few seconds.

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.

Speeding reduces a driver's ability to steer safely around curves on the highway or avoid objects in the roadway. It extends the distance necessary to stop the vehicle, increases the distance a vehicle travels while a driver reacts, and reduces the effectiveness of the vehicle's safety features. The faster the vehicle is traveling, the greater the impact if the vehicle does crash. Inversely, the effectiveness of restraint devices like airbags and safety belts and vehicular construction features such as crumple zones and side member beams decline as impact speed increases. The probability of a disfiguring or debilitating injury or death increases with higher speed on impact.