

COMMUNITY COMMENT, OCTOBER 2, 2012

This is Officer Matt Harvey with the California Highway Patrol for Community Comment.

Today's youth are tomorrow's future, and we should make it our mission to do everything in our power to protect them on the road. For young drivers between the ages of 15-20 years old, traffic collisions are the leading cause of death for teens in America. Teenagers are involved in three times as many fatal crashes as all other drivers.

Inexperience combined with speed, a lack of seat belt compliance, distractions, alcohol or any other risk-taking behavior can have deadly results behind the wheel. Unlike a video game, you aren't given multiple lives and there isn't a reset button. The California Highway Patrol's goal is to arm California's youth with enough knowledge to make smart driving decisions.

Everyone knows drinking and driving is a primary cause of teen crashes and teen deaths. Here are a few statistics you may not know:

16-year-old drivers are three times more likely to die in a car crash than other drivers.

Simple driver error is a factor in two-thirds of fatal teen crashes.

Two-thirds of teen occupants killed in crashes are not wearing seat belts.

In 2005, 12 percent of high school males reported driving after drinking.

Two or more peer passengers more than triples the risk of a fatal crash with a teen at the wheel.

Two-thirds of teens who die in car crashes are passengers of teen drivers.

Speeding is a factor in 40 percent of all teen driver fatalities.

Being awake for 18 hours is similar to having a blood alcohol concentration level of .08, which is legally drunk.

The CHP is hoping National Teen Driver Safety week October 14th through 20th will serve as an important reminder for teens and their parents or guardians to get involved with any number of the traffic safety programs the California Highway Patrol offers which are geared toward teen drivers.

Start Smart is a driver safety education class targeting new and future licensed teenage drivers between the age of 15-19 and their parents or guardians. CHP Officers discuss traffic collision avoidance techniques, collision causational factors, driver/parent responsibilities, seatbelt usage, and more.

Every 15 Minutes is a program that is put on at the local high school and focuses on high school juniors and seniors, which challenges them to think about drinking, driving, personal safety, the responsibility of making mature decisions and the impact their decisions have on family, friends, and many others.

Kids will imitate you and your behaviors. Parents or guardians can help reinforce what their teen drivers learn in these programs by practicing safe driving habits at all times. This will help our young drivers mature into great drivers for the rest of their lives.

The Start Smart class is now being offered several times throughout the year in Humboldt and Mendocino counties. You can contact your local CHP office for more information about Start Smart and to obtain times and locations of an upcoming class.

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