

Safety NETS

SUMMER 2002

Information to help keep your employees safe on the road

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE MINNESOTA NETWORK OF EMPLOYERS FOR TRAFFIC SAFETY

Whether you employ teen workers or parents of teens, the issue of teen driving can have an impact on your business. The following essay was written by a Minnesota high-school-aged youth who was involved in a crash last November. It's a powerful testament to the human suffering that can result from a crash.

"For one moment my concentration drifted..."

The events of one single instant can forever alter the course of one's life. This was true for me on November 10, 2001. My car collided with another car heading westbound on Highway 55. Later that night, the man in the other car died of injuries sustained in the accident. On that day, the lives of two families were thrown into upheaval. I still carry the shock and grief of that day with me now six months later.

The facts were simple. I ran a red light and struck a car crossing the intersection. The other car flipped and landed top down in the eastbound lane. My car spun 180 degrees. I was not speeding. I was not talking on a cell phone. I was not eating. I was not under the influence of drugs or alcohol. It was a nice afternoon and from the most desirable driving conditions derived the most undesirable result. For one

moment my concentration drifted and horrors of the world crept up on me.

We are all young and invincible, or at least we feel that way. We race our cars, drive without seatbelts, blast our music, eat, talk on cell phones and partake in a million other distractions. One single distraction for one single instant can expose our vulnerabilities. One distraction can alter your life and force you to experience the pain that I have. One single distraction can cause another boy or girl to lose a parent, another wife to lose a husband, another person to lose a friend and another child to lose a role model. We are just too naive to accept those possibilities.

I write this article now six months after that single moment that changed my life. I pray every

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The Facts About Teen Driving

- Crashes are the leading cause of death for teenagers
 - Teen drivers are involved in more motor vehicle crashes than any other group.
 - Teens make up less than 7% of the nation's licensed drivers, but they're involved in 14% of all fatal crashes.
 - Sixty-five percent of teen passenger deaths occur when another teenager is behind the wheel.
 - 41% of fatal crashes involving teenagers occur at nighttime, between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m.
- One solution: Graduated Driver Licensing, a phased process that puts teens behind the wheel but in lower risk settings so they can get the experience that builds safe driving practices and attitudes.
Source: National Safety Council

day that nobody goes through the grief that I went through. I pray even harder that nobody will experience the pain I have caused. Sadly, the world does not work this way. We can't just wish our troubles away. We can, however, take measure to prevent them. We can begin by accepting that we are not invincible and, in doing so, we can accept the responsibility of driving. We are not just responsible for our own life and the life our passengers, but also for the life of every other person on the road.

I am a living witness to the atrocities that can occur even in an ideal situation. I carry with me the death of another man as further proof of what can happen in one moment. I now live with the burden to educate. We all live with the burden to listen. You are not invincible. Do not fill yourself with

misconceptions that you are. Do not let a man die in vain. Help me to honor his memory by taking my lesson to heart.

If I were to have read this article six months ago, I would have never believed that this could happen to me. It can happen and it did happen; the remnants of that day still bear down upon me like a weight I can never lift alone. I stand at the crossroads of my life with one great realization: life does not provide ideal situations. It is the decisions and actions we take in the face of the worst situations that create the person we become. We must expect the best but always be prepared to react to the worst.

That is all we can do: understand we are not invincible and live life as it comes. But never forget what can happen in just one instant.

On the Road Again: Summer Driving Tips

As you head to the lake, the North Shore or cross country, keep these driving tips in mind:

Always carry a roadside emergency and first aid kit. Consider investing in a cellular phone—it can be a lifesaver in an emergency. If you need to make a call, find a safe place and pull over.

Wear safety belts. Safety belts reduce the risk of death by 45–60 percent according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The risk of injury is reduced 50–65 percent.

Keep children safe. The back seat is the safest place for children to ride, and all children must be restrained with the correct safety equipment. Minnesota law requires that children be restrained in child car seats until age 4. Children 40 to 80 pounds and between 4 and 8 years old should sit in a booster seat in order for safety belts to fit properly and provide maximum protection.

Never leave a child (or pet) unattended in a vehicle, even with the windows rolled down slightly. In warm weather

your car's interior heats up rapidly. Your child could die of heatstroke in a very short period of time.

In bad weather, turn your headlights on. Minnesota law requires that headlights must be on whenever there is precipitation and whenever your visibility is reduced to 500 feet or less.

In good weather, allow three seconds of following time behind the car in front of you. In adverse weather, add one second for each condition (fog, rain, etc.). If someone is tailgating you, get out of the way and let them pass.

Summer in Minnesota means road construction. Be alert to road conditions and the added activity of workers and machines. Fines for speed violations double in work zones.

Increased activity in the summer, combined with later daylight hours, often means that we're cheating ourselves on sleep. Driving while drowsy can be as deadly as drinking and driving. Caffeine and other stimulants are no substitutes for sleep: their effects wear off rapidly. If driving long distances, plan frequent breaks. Walk, stretch or even take a nap. If you have passengers, share the driving.



Making Minnesota A Safer Place To Live
Chapter of the National Safety Council
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