



NEWS RELEASE

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END OF SCHOOL YEAR PERIOD POSES RISKS FOR TEENS BEHIND THE WHEEL

Belt Use Dips, Drinking and Driving Cases Increase

ST. PAUL — Seat belt use among teens appears to dip during the last few months of the school year and the percentage of traffic deaths involving drinking teen drivers jumps during the same period, according to Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS) data.

Although the prom through graduation period isn't the deadliest period for Minnesota's 16–19 year olds — 31 were killed 2004–2006 — traffic death data during April–June reveals that potential for tragedy is ripe as a result of seat belt non-use and drinking and driving.

In April–June during 2004–2006, 71 percent of teen vehicle occupants killed in crashes were not belted. In comparison to the rest of the year, 58 percent of teens killed were not buckled up.

“Seat belt non-use is a major factor why traffic crashes are the leading killer of teens,” says Cheri Marti, director of the DPS Office of Traffic Safety. “The first step to preventing teen deaths is getting this age group to buckle up.”

Alcohol-related crashes also add to the potential dangers at the end of the school year. During April–June during 2004–2006, teen drivers were involved in crashes that resulted in 66 traffic deaths. Of these deaths, 21 percent of the victims were killed in crashes that involved a teen driver that had been drinking. In comparison to the rest of the year, drinking teen drivers were involved in crashes that accounted for 15 percent of traffic deaths. More than 10,500 motorists under age 21 were arrested for DWI during 2004–2006 — 25 percent of the arrests occurred during this April–June period.

The state's “Not a Drop” law says driving minors cited for any amount of alcohol use will lose their license from 30 to 180 days, and face up to a \$700 fine and 90 days in jail. Minors will lose their license until age 18 if they are arrested for DWI or involved in an impaired driving crash or crime. Trying to purchase alcohol with a fake ID can result in a loss of driving privileges for at least 90 days. There were 7,509 “Not a Drop” violations issued to drivers under age 21 during 2004–2006 — 28 percent of the violations occurred during the April–June period.

Teen drivers, ages 16–19, were involved in crashes that resulted in 312 traffic deaths during 2004–2006.

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