



NEWS RELEASE

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NEED A DATE FOR PROM? TAKE A SEAT BELT

Officials Stress Teen Driving Safety During Potentially Deadly Period

ST. PAUL — Public safety officials are encouraging parents of teen drivers to stress seat belt use, focus on the task of driving and discuss the consequences of drinking and driving in advance of prom and end-of-school-year period. According Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS), more than half (56 percent) of teens (ages 16–19) killed during spring in recent years were not belted. DPS also reports teen drinking and driving-related crashes peak April through June.

DPS notes there is a heightened potential for teen crashes during April–June based on the celebratory nature of the season with prom, graduation and end-of-school-year events which can put teens at risk — and risk-taking teens — behind the wheel.

“Safe driving issues, such as lack of belt use, underage drinking and distractions can take a back seat when teen minds are on prom, graduation and summer break,” says Cheri Marti, director of the DPS Office of Traffic Safety. “While it’s an exciting time of year, teens need to take driving seriously.”

During 2005–2007, 149 teen motorists were killed in crashes and nearly 60 percent were unbelted. During this same period in April–June: 25 teens were killed (11 unbelted); 388 teens were involved in alcohol-related crashes (1,366 total); and 2,787 were arrested for DWI (11,000 total). Another 1,901 teens were convicted of “Not-a-Drop” violations in April–June — a penalty for any amount of alcohol detected while driving that results in loss of license for up to 180 days and a \$700 fine.

DPS says teen driving safety messages become especially relevant as the state approaches the deadly summer driving months. During 2005–2007 in July–September, 43 teens were killed — 60 percent unbelted. Fatal teen drinking and driving crashes and teen DWI arrests also spike in summer.

DPS encourages parents to take an active role in keeping teens safe behind the wheel:

- Continue to monitor and train teens in a variety of road conditions and environments.
- Discuss and reinforce teen driving rules and develop a teen-parent driving contract detailing passenger and nighttime limits, requirements for seat belt use and prohibiting cell phones/texting.
- Be a positive role model — buckle up, drive at safe speeds, pay attention, drive sober.
- Educate teens about drinking and driving offenses, and be aware providers of alcohol to minors can face felony charges if the teen is involved in an alcohol-related crash that causes injury or death.

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