

MEDIA RELEASE

Back to School Message for Parents of Teen Drivers

Burnaby, BC / September 21, 2009 – Approximately 35,000 teenagers enter the driving licensing system every year in B.C. If your child earned their “N” over the summer, then this is a back to school message you should read carefully.

Driver distractions like texting, talking on cell phones, and friends in the car can be deadly for teen drivers. “Many parents forget that driving is a high-risk activity that can have serious consequences, not only for the driver but for their passengers, and all road users,” says David Dunne, Director of Road Safety for the BCAA Traffic Safety Foundation.

There is a video making the rounds on the Internet that is a realistic and shocking reenactment of a car crash involving young drivers and their passengers who are texting friends, talking on their cell phones, and are not properly restrained by seatbelts while driving along a highway.

The video shows the horror of death and injury that can happen to drivers, passengers, and others in a collision. Too often this is the case with young drivers.

A recent discussion paper released by the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General of BC states that young drivers in the age category 16 – 24 have the highest rates of cell phone use of any age group and more young drivers use cell phones, at any given moment on the roads, than all other age groups combined.

The same research demonstrates that the overall pattern of results indicates that novice drivers perform poorer relative to experienced drivers. Like all drivers, new and young drivers are unable to adapt to the use of any interactive electronic device and its demands while driving. A combination of inexperience, a tendency toward greater risk-taking, and a significantly higher than average use of distracting electronic devices makes this group particularly vulnerable.

“Kids will use their cell phones and mp3 players while driving, and they will sneak their friends into the car. We've seen cases of deadly crashes involving the driver and three or four passengers not related to the driver,” says Dunne.

Although the Graduated Learning Process allows for new drivers to transport immediate family members, having siblings in the car can also be a real distraction for the driver.

Sandra Jones, coordinator for the BCAA Traffic Safety Foundation Young Drivers Program, suggest that parents need to be active role models of safe driving practice, not use cell phones while driving, ensure the graduated license program rules are strictly adhered to, and set boundaries and consequences within the context of family rules to help a new driver be safe. Kids need to be able to resist peer pressure and develop the skills required to be safe adult drivers.

The B.C. Coroners Service reported in 2008 that transport tragedies remain the most frequent preventable child deaths in B.C.

According to the 2007 Traffic Collision Statistics report, 1,335 drivers and 976 passengers between the age of sixteen and nineteen were injured in vehicle crashes. Twenty-one drivers and thirteen passengers in this age group lost their lives.

In British Columbia, there are no existing or specific laws that prohibit the use of electronic devices while driving. Dunne reminds parents that until B.C. has laws in place specifically prohibiting cell phone use and texting for new and young drivers, parents need to understand the risks and prohibit their own kids from doing so while driving.

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About BCAA Traffic Safety Foundation

The BCAA Traffic Safety Foundation is a non-profit registered charity working with families, communities and business partners to reduce the number and severity of traffic crashes and injuries in B.C. For more information visit www.BCAATSF.ca or call 604-298-5107.

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