

A MESSAGE TO YOUNG DRIVERS

by David B. Brown

This is an exciting time of your lives -- you have so much to look forward to. We know that the very last thing you want to do is to ruin it all by getting hurt or hurting someone else in a car crash.

Nevertheless, in Alabama, young drivers (ages 16-20) caused over 22,000 crashes in 2010. That is on average about one crash every 15 minutes during normal driving hours.

In 2010 these crashes resulted in 119 deaths and 7340 injured persons.

The chances of your being involved, if not causing a car crash, over the next five years is so high that many traffic safety experts feel that it is almost inevitable for most young drivers.

Ask your friends who have been involved in crashes just how much turmoil it caused in their lives. This is something that you do not need, and it can be avoided. Please read on to see how.

All of these numbers and warnings are meaningless unless you realize that it can, and almost certainly will happen to you if you do not do something now to establish a basic safety habit.

What can you do? You know the rules of the road, you passed your drivers' test, you have great reflexes ... what else do you need?

Fact: People rarely cause collisions when they are anticipating that *it can happen to them* and really thinking about it. Imaging this must become an established habit.

How do you establish it? Take out your car key and look at it right now. Concentrate on it, and make a promise to yourself that every time you put that key into the ignition you **will** bring to your mind the real possibility that *you could kill someone or end up spending the rest of your life in a wheelchair.*

Do not be afraid to think about it and concentrate on it. Some actually fear that this will increase the chances of your being in a crash -- just the opposite is true. *If you become complacent, you increase your risk dramatically.*

Ask any of your friends who have been there! They will tell you: "It was the last thing on my mind."

One of the most recent causes of fatalities among teens is texting and the use of cell phones while driving. If you are serious about safety you will take the time to read

about those who did not see this to be a problem, and as a result, they lost friends and loved ones –

<http://www.safehomealabama.gov/InfoTraining/DistractedDriving.aspx>

Do not fall into this trap – texting is deadly, and just talking on a cell phone greatly diminishes the full concentration you need to keep you and your passengers safe.

Recognize that without taking constant action to prevent it, the natural tendency on the road is to stumble into unsafe situations. It is up to you to see these inevitable hazardous situations and to take action to avoid them.

Always act to move to a safer situation. The following can help:

- Look well ahead for hazard indicators – brake lights coming on, an approaching intersection, warning signs ... these require action ... if you ignore them the hazard will be upon you before you know it.
- Whenever possible, increase the distance between you and other vehicles. Do not give in to the herd instinct to tailgate with others. You cannot crash into a vehicle that is not near you.
- If you are being tailgated, just look for a safe stretch, and then gradually slow down and give them a chance to pass. After that, they are no longer your problem.
- Don't let others do your driving for you by forcing you to speed up and become part of a tight group. Safely increase the separation between yourself and other vehicles to greatly reduce your probability of a crash. Resist the herd instinct.
- It can take twice as long to stop going down a hill as on level ground. Don't put yourself in a situation where you have to learn this the hard way.
- Curves are deadly to young people, especially in wet weather – there is just no remedy if you are going too fast – the laws of physics are irrevocable.
- Don't let your friends distract you or cause you to take chances – you are the driver, and it is your responsibility.
- If the weather, the traffic, the fact that you are lost, or anything else gets you into a confused situation, find a safe place and pull over and just sit and relax until you know that things are under control and you are ready to continue ... doing this is a sign of maturity and strength, not weakness.

Do we have to mention: buckle up? It is the number one defensive action that you can take to save your life and that of your passengers. So, make your passengers buckle up too. As the driver, this is your responsibility.

Between two and three people are killed on Alabama roadways every day, many of them young people. This terrible problem will never be solved until all of us understand how critical our individual decisions are to the safety of ourselves, our friends and our loved ones.