

## COMMUNITY COMMENT, JUNE 26, 2012

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This is Officer Matt Harvey with the California Highway Patrol for Community Comment.

Getting their driver's license opens a new world to young drivers. Suddenly, the possibility of new destinations and experiences with friends are within grasp. But a new driver lacks the experience that is sometimes needed on the road. Situations can appear in a second, sometimes too fast for a new driver to respond to.

In an era where most households in the United States have at least one video game console depicting virtually real-life scenarios of high speed driving, car chases, and other high-adrenaline video games, our youth generation is not unfamiliar with the idea of being involved in a major traffic collision. The only difference is that in a video game you can push the reset button and try again until you master the task at hand. Unfortunately, in real-life we don't have that luxury. But, there are ways to avoid dangerous situations. There are ways to keep a new driver - and their passengers - safe on the road.

First, let's take a look at the statistics. Traffic collisions are the No. 1 killer of teenagers in America. The grim statistics tell us that motor vehicle accidents will kill more than 900 teens in California this year, far more than any other cause. On average, that's one per high school. These are our sons and daughters, nieces and nephews, students, friends, and family.

When asked "What do you consider lethal?", a teenager might say things such as "drunk driving", "driving too fast", and "not wearing a seatbelt". These are the obvious. How about if we add to the list texting, talking on a cell phone, selecting a song to play on a media device, applying makeup, and eating... all while driving a vehicle. This is just a small list of the things that are killing our teenagers today.

Cell phones can now be used as a computer to search the internet, a GPS device, a personal assistant, a mirror for applying make-up, and anything else you can imagine.

So what is the solution to reducing traffic collisions involving teenagers? It starts with educating our teenagers and their parents before the teen gets behind the wheel.

Start Smart is a driver safety education class developed by the California Highway Patrol that targets new and future licensed teenage drivers between the age of 15-19, their parents, and guardians. CHP Officers discuss traffic collision avoidance techniques, collision causal factors, driver/parent responsibilities, seatbelt usage, and more. Testimonies are provided by officers who have investigated fatal collisions involving teens, along with the latest "RED ASPHALT" video which chronicles the aftermath of several teenage driver collisions.

The CHP offers the Start Smart program to help newly and future licensed teen drivers become more aware of the responsibilities that accompany the privilege of being a licensed California driver.

This free class is now being offered several times throughout the year in Humboldt and Mendocino counties. You can contact your local CHP office for more information about Start Smart and to obtain times and locations of an upcoming class.

This has been Officer Matt Harvey with the California Highway Patrol for Community Comment.