

**Remarks prepared for
David Strickland, Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration**

**Teen Driving Safety Forum
Minneapolis
June 1, 2010
“Decisions and Consequences”**

**Good morning. Thank you, Senator Klobuchar, for
the invitation to join you today and for organizing this
Teen Driving Safety Forum.**

Today's discussion about Teen Driving Safety is, in truth, a discussion about making decisions and dealing, head on, with the consequences.

Let me throw some words at you: jail, handcuffs, arrest, car crash, DUI, death, ambulance, emergency room, funerals. These are not just words. They describe the possible consequences of making a bad decision when you are behind the wheel.

Here are some more: texting, speeding, alcohol, distraction. When you decide to speed, or text, or drink illegally, or be distracted, you don't always get to choose the consequence, but you will invariably face at least one consequence, if not several.

I'm not being dramatic. Go ahead, Google the words "car crash distraction." I did. I got hundreds of matches. It's almost a daily story in the newspapers.

And unfortunately, this story is not just a big city story. For Americans aged 15-20, you and your high school classmates, the leading cause of death is a motor vehicle crash. You die at this rate because: you speed, you won't buckle up, you drink, and you get distracted.

Now... we all know that you cannot legally drink ... yet ... however, 16-to-20 year-olds are almost twice as likely to die in a crash involving alcohol. You are about two-and-half times more likely to die while driving or riding unbuckled, and you are nearly three times as likely as the average American to die in a speed-related crash.

Sometimes you'll crash because you've been drinking when you shouldn't and then driving, and sometimes it's because you are speeding and showing off. And it's not even just a "guy thing" anymore. But many times it isn't related to drinking or speeding; it's simply the distraction of having too many people in the vehicle who are chatting and playing the radio and having a great time and doing no harm to anybody—except to the driver, who gets distracted.

So it's not "bad kids" or "problem" kids who are dying—it is good kids, great kids ... it is ...you... making bad decisions ... and that's why these kinds of crashes are so heartbreaking.

How can we make things better? ... How can we help you stay alive on our streets and highways? It is going to take a lot of hard work. It's going to take some thinking by you, every time you get behind the wheel.

You are at this forum, so you have started doing your part. And I'm thrilled to see parents here, because the first line of defense is the family. Each of us must take responsibility for ourselves and our loved ones, including buckling up, and making good decisions about driving and risk taking. Don't be afraid to insist that your friends do the same.

Parents, set the example. Your kids are watching you.

When you are ready to turn over the keys to your young driver, make sure you have set standards for safe driving. And more importantly, you must make those standards stick.

At NHTSA, we believe in a three-tiered approach to teen driving safety.

First, reduce teen access to alcohol. We do this by staying focused on high visibility enforcement of teen purchase, possession, and provision laws. We believe a key component of this equation is fostering parental involvement in prevention programs.

Next, we continue to promote belt use, through enforcement, media, and parental and community involvement.

Third, we really believe in graduated driver licensing (GDL) laws, including enactment of 3-stage GDL legislation, highly publicized enforcement of GDL laws and parental responsibility for monitoring compliance.

After all is said and done, though, it all boils down to a decision you make. So think about it. The next time you get behind the wheel, or the next time you get into a friend's car or truck. Think about the consequences of not asking your friend to slow down, or not buckling up. Think about whether a text message or conversation is worth a trip to jail or the hospital.

Each of you has the potential for great things; a successful career, a rewarding family life, unlimited opportunity to contribute to your world – an entire lifetime to live. Why risk all of this by making a careless decision that can have dire consequences?

Thank you.