

Remarks prepared for
David Strickland, Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
For the
Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD)
Teen Traffic Safety Briefing
Washington, D.C.
July 24, 2013
Choose Freedom, Choose Responsibility

Good morning. Thank you, Augustin (Arreola). I am so sorry for your loss and I thank you for finding the strength to turn personal tragedy into action. By speaking out on the issue of traffic safety, you are helping save lives. And I hope your example will lead other teens to do the same.

- Thank you, Penny (Wells) for the invitation to be a part of this safety discussion and for your work keeping teens engaged in their own safety. Dr. Mausch, thank you for your leadership of SADD, and your unwavering support.

On behalf of Secretary Foxx, I can say that you have his, and the entire Department of Transportation's, support in your efforts to improve the safety of America's teenage drivers behind the wheel.

Young drivers, such as the students in the room, play a pivotal role in educating their fellow students and convincing their peers to not speed, to not drink and drive, to not drive distracted, and to wear a seat belt.

Involving and engaging teens in the safety process helps them understand that the freedom of mobility comes from choosing responsibility behind the wheel. SADD does a great job of this and we are thrilled to work with them. In fact, we host a SADD student every summer—the student intern this year is Carrie Sandstrom and she is here with us this morning.

As Adrian (Lund) discussed, traffic crashes are the leading cause of death for teenagers in America. The major reasons for these higher crash and fatality rates boil down to inexperience, immaturity and a greater willingness to take risks.

At NHTSA, we've been working for many years saving lives on our Nation's highways, but nowhere has our commitment been stronger than in the high-priority efforts to ensure the safety of our children, both before and after they become drivers.

We work diligently with our state safety partners to tackle this issue head on. Our decades of experience with seat belts and drunk driving has taught us it takes a combination of leadership

at all levels of government, public education, effective enforcement and adjudication, and grassroots advocacy, to improve and sustain safety performance.

I'd like to take a few minutes and talk about our multi-tiered approach to teen safety, including our efforts to eliminate Distracted Driving, reduce teen access to alcohol, encourage seat belt use, and expand the use of graduated driver's licenses.

One of the most effective ways to help young drivers at the State level is the enactment of Graduated Driver's Licenses or GDLs. We have been working with motor vehicle administrators, educators, law enforcement, and parent organizations to promote the enactment and enforcement of effective GDL laws. A GDL allows young drivers to gradually gain the skills they need to safely operate their vehicles.

Additionally, we want to reduce teen access to alcohol. Although teens are not allowed to legally consume any amount of alcohol, in 2011, 32 percent of the young drivers killed in crashes had a BAC of .01g/dL or higher. We have to do better. And we are working with law enforcement, alcohol control boards, and the hospitality industry to make sure we do.

We all know that seat belts are the single most effective safety technology ever put in a vehicle, but young drivers are less likely to use a seat belt. In 2011, 70 percent of young drivers killed in crashes who had been drinking were not belted. But, that number is still much too high—49 percent—for young drivers killed who had not been drinking. We will push to increase belt use using all the tools we have, including through enforcement, media, and parental and community involvement.

To the young drivers in the room, many of you are in the early days of what will hopefully be a long history of positive driving experiences. The rest of us remember being your age.

For me, my first car meant I would finally have a social life! Today, you are part of a tremendously social and connected world that doesn't require a vehicle, only your favorite smart phone. You're connected at all times, and while I wish I had that kind of social experience at your age, I have to tell you that poses a unique set of problems.

Distractions, particularly those caused by technology, greatly exacerbate the issues surrounding inexperience and immaturity. A text message combined with inexperience in identifying dangerous situations is often a deadly combination. Add to that other risk-taking behavior, such as speeding or not wearing seat belts, and we see tragic consequences.

By leveraging what we've learned, NHTSA has developed a plan to eliminate distraction-related crashes with an integrated approach that includes research, laws, and high visibility enforcement to move us forward.

Parental involvement is one of the most critical elements in the development of safe and prepared teen drivers. Parents are role models – teens will often mimic their parents' driving habits. Parents must establish regular supervised driving sessions and maintain consistent dialogue with their teens as they progress through the learning-to-drive process.

At NHTSA, we feel so strongly on this last point that I am taking this opportunity to announce we'll be launching a Teen Driving Safety campaign this fall, to coincide with Teen Driver Safety week in October. We will be reaching out to parents as well as teens.

Thank you everyone. What you are doing makes our own efforts in research, enforcement, and outreach that much more effective. Together we can save lives and protect our friends, families and communities.

Thank you.