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STUDY SHOWS 90 PERCENT OF TEENS ADMIT STRONGER LIKELIHOOD OF DRINKING AND DRIVING ON PROM NIGHT, YET LESS THAN ONE-THIRD SEE DANGERS

Compliant Parents May be Unwitting Enablers to Unsafe Prom and Graduation Nights, but Family Safe Driving Agreement at www.LibertyMutualTeenDriving.com Can Play Significant Role in Deterring Teens' Dangerous or Distracted Driving Habits

BOSTON – April 8, 2010 – Each year, spring school rituals – prom and graduation – begin with so much excitement and promise yet end in tragedy for hundreds of teen drivers and their passengers. New research from Liberty Mutual Insurance and SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) suggests this season could be no different. According to a national survey of more than 2,500 eleventh and twelfth graders, 90 percent of teens believe their counterparts are more likely to drink and drive on prom night and 79 percent believe the same is true for graduation night. Yet, that belief does not translate to concern, as only 29 percent and 25 percent of teens say that driving on prom night and graduation night, respectively, comes with a high degree of danger.

“Newspapers, television, YouTube and Facebook are rife with tales of tragedy from reckless driving on prom and graduation nights, yet an ‘it won’t happen to me’ attitude continues to be so pervasive among our teens,” said Dave Melton, a driving safety expert with the Liberty Mutual Research Institute for Safety. “Add to the alcohol factor distractions like texting or talking on the cell phone while driving, or the greater likelihood of multiple people in the car, and the crash potential is very real.”

Real it is: there were 380 teen alcohol-related traffic deaths during prom and graduation season (April, May and June) in 2007, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. And the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety reports 1,009 total teen fatalities (alcohol and non-alcohol-related) in motor vehicle crashes during those same months in 2008.

Alarming, parents may be unwitting enablers of drinking and driving: more than one in three teens (36 percent) say their parents have allowed them to attend parties where it is known that alcohol will be served, and 14 percent say their parents have, in fact, hosted such teen gatherings.

Parents Play a Key Role

The Liberty Mutual/SADD study suggests that parents have a tremendous opportunity to enhance their role in deterring unsafe driving behaviors among teens. More than one in five teens (22 percent) say their parents have either not spoken with them about driving safety at all or have only talked with them once. Past Liberty Mutual/SADD research strongly indicates that teens who have regular conversations with their parents about driving safety are less likely to drink and drive, less likely to speed, and are more likely to wear their seat belts.

Further, more than half (52 percent) of teens admit they are not responsible for abiding by any formal or informal family driving safety rules. Yet, the opportunity certainly exists: 64 percent of teens who have not entered into any written agreement with their parents about safe driving rules say they would be willing to do so.

“When parents and teens build their safe driving plans together, it prompts effective, face-to-face communication, which we know leads to safer driving behaviors,” says SADD Chairman Stephen Wallace. “Teens want freedom, trust and respect from their parents – exactly what teens themselves tell us a safe driving agreement would provide.”

Indeed, 71 percent of teens say a formal safe driving agreement will increase their parents’ trust in them and more than half (55 percent) believe it would afford them more freedom.

Importantly, those who do have formal driving safety rules established with their parents are significantly more likely than teens who have no family driving safety rules to say such an agreement would encourage them to change their driving habits (44 percent vs. 26 percent) and

would make it easier for them to resist peer pressure when it comes to making a decision between safe and unsafe driving behaviors (58 percent vs. 42 percent).

Liberty Mutual and SADD offer a customizable Family Ground Rules driving agreement at www.libertymutualteendriving.com that provides a framework for parents and teens to set and agree to specific rules around key safe driving issues such as speeding, the number of passengers in the car, cell phone usage, texting while driving and curfews. Upon acceptance, these ground rules – with mutually agreed upon rewards and consequences – can be printed and posted on the refrigerator so parents and teens can refer back to them throughout the year.

Other Distractions

While drinking and driving is a dangerous behavior unto itself, many teens are introducing other distractions into the mix when they are behind the wheel. More than one-in-three teens say they often change songs on their MP3 players, speed or text; while more than one-in-four confess that they regularly drive with multiple passengers or talk on the cell phone while driving. They do this despite significant percentages who admit the behavior is very distracting. For example, 33 percent of teens report texting while driving “often” or “very often,” even though 40 percent find the behavior “very” or “extremely” distracting.

About the Liberty Mutual/SADD Teen Driving Partnership

Since 1991, Liberty Mutual and SADD have collaborated on research and responsible solutions to keep families safe behind the wheel. In addition to the Family Driving Ground Rules agreement, www.LibertyMutualTeenDriving.com also features helpful resources, such as tips on how to talk to teens about driving distractions and dangers such as cell phones, text messaging, speeding, and alcohol and drug use; video demonstrations of safe driving techniques; state-by-state teen driving laws; individual car safety scores; tips on buying and caring for a car; and an exclusive 50 percent discount for teens to take the National Safety Council’s online Defensive Driving Course.

Teens also can use the website to remind their parents about driving safety by taking a 10-question driving quiz and then challenging Mom and Dad to match or beat their score.

About the Survey

Liberty Mutual and SADD commissioned ORC Guideline to conduct a qualitative and quantitative survey to measure teen driving attitudes and behaviors. The study was initiated with a series of five focus groups held in Boston, Denver and Minneapolis in April 2009. The study also involved surveying a total of 2,531 teens in eleventh and twelfth grades from 25 randomly recruited high schools across the country in the fall of 2009. These findings can be interpreted with a 95 percent confidence interval with an error margin of +/- 1.7 percent.

About Liberty Mutual Group

"Helping people live safer, more secure lives" since 1912, Boston-based Liberty Mutual Group (www.LibertyMutualGroup.com) is a diversified global insurer and fifth-largest property and casualty insurer in the U.S. based on 2008 direct written premium. Liberty Mutual Group ranks 86th on the Fortune 500 list of largest U.S. corporations, based on 2008 revenue. The company has over 45,000 employees located in more than 900 offices throughout the world.

The eighth-largest auto and home insurer in the U.S., Liberty Mutual (www.libertymutual.com) sells full lines of coverage for automobile, homeowners, valuable possessions, personal liability, and individual life insurance. The company is an industry leader in affinity partnerships, offering car and home insurance to employees and members of more than 12,000 companies, credit unions, professional associations and alumni groups.

About SADD

For more than 27 years, SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) has been committed to empowering young people to lead education and prevention initiatives in their schools and communities. Founded as Students Against Driving Drunk in 1981, SADD (www.sadd.org) has become the nation's preeminent peer-to-peer youth education, prevention and activism organization, with nearly 10,000 chapters in middle schools, high schools, and colleges nationwide. SADD now highlights prevention of many destructive behaviors that are harmful to young people, including underage drinking, substance abuse, risky and impaired driving, and teen violence and suicide.

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