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## **DRINKING AND DRIVING REMAINS A SERIOUS THREAT TO TEEN SAFETY, NATIONAL STUDY FINDS**

### **SADD/Liberty Mutual Study Finds Family Communication Is a Key to Keeping Teens Safe**

BOSTON (May 21, 2001) – An annual study conducted by SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions/Students Against Driving Drunk) and Liberty Mutual Group finds that despite gains made during the past two decades in reducing alcohol-related crash deaths among 15- to 20-year-olds, drinking and driving remains a serious threat to the safety of teenagers. Furthermore, the study shows that teens are significantly more concerned about the serious threat of drinking and driving than are their parents.

With recent national safety statistics pointing to a rise in alcohol-related traffic deaths, the SADD/Liberty Mutual study also finds that constructive family discussions about driving expectations can significantly affect teen behaviors and ultimately reduce such incidents. SADD and Liberty Mutual offer tools to help families discuss driving safety during Buckle Up America Week, May 21-28 (listed below).

In the SADD/Liberty Mutual telephone survey of approximately 500 high school teenagers and 500 parents with high school teenagers, only 54 percent of parents expressed concern about drinking and driving, as compared to 82 percent of teens.

Findings also reveal that more teens believe drinking and driving is dangerous (40 percent) than do parents (28 percent).

“There seems to be a ‘problem solved’ mentality among many parents, who mistakenly believe that the issue of teen drinking and driving has been successfully addressed,” said Stephen Wallace, National Chairman and CEO of SADD. “This body of research should serve as a wake-up call that our work is not done.”

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### NHTSA Drinking and Driving Statistics

Motor vehicle accidents remain the leading cause of death for 15- to 20-year-olds, based on the latest available mortality data from the National Center for Health Statistics. Statistics from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) confirm that the decline in alcohol-related deaths, which numbered 5,380 in 1982, reached a plateau in the mid-1990s and has risen back to its highest level in three years, ending an almost 20-year downward trend.

NHTSA reports 8,175 young drivers in the U.S. ages 15-20 were involved in fatal crashes in 1999, resulting in the deaths of 5,329 youths in that age group (of which 3,561 were the drivers themselves). In total, 6,374 fifteen- to 20-year-olds were killed in auto accidents that year, and alcohol use was cited in 2,238 of these fatalities, the highest level since 1996.

### Parents Influence Teen Driving Behaviors

More than half of the teens surveyed (52 percent) say their parents are “very” or “extremely” influential when it comes to their driving behaviors. Teens whose parents talk with them about driving behaviors are more likely to say their parents influence their driving habits (63 percent) than are those whose parents do not talk to them about driving (33 percent).

“Our research demonstrates that when parents commit to communicating with their children about this important issue, behaviors can change and lives can be saved,” stated John B. Conners, Liberty Mutual Group executive vice president and manager, Personal Insurance. “Unfortunately, some adults do not believe that this problem warrants serious attention.”

The SADD/Liberty Mutual study reveals that teens who spend substantial time with their parents or talk to them about behavioral expectations are less likely to drink, drink and drive, and speed, and are more likely to wear their seat belt.

- Teens whose parents talk to them about drinking are less likely to drink “regularly” (12 percent) than are teens who do not talk to their parents about drinking (28 percent). Further, the data suggests teens drink and drive less if they talk to their parents about drinking (8 percent) than if they do not talk to them (18 percent).

- Teens whose parents talk with them about driving behaviors are less likely to speed (62 percent) than are teens whose parents do not discuss driving behaviors (80 percent);
- Teens who spend substantial time with their parents are more likely to wear seat belts than are those who do not spend substantial time with their parents.

### Safety Message Is More Important Than the Law to Teens

Safety is the primary message that parents should deliver to their teens about driving. According to survey results, nearly 90 percent of teens use seat belts for “safety” reasons; only 13 percent say they wear a seat belt because “it’s the law.” One in three parents, on the other hand, wears a seat belt to comply with the law. Similarly, teens are less rules conscious about speeding than are parents, as only 20 percent of teens who do not speed say the law influences their decision, compared to 40 percent of parents who do not speed.

“Teen awareness and responsiveness to seat belt safety is exciting news for America and gives us continued hope that we can do much more to reduce the number of teens killed in car crashes each year,” said Connors. “As parents, we must recognize the power of our words and our actions and constructively use our influence to keep our teens safe behind the wheel or as passengers.”

### Dangerous Finding

The study reveals that teens are practicing one dangerous behavior much more than parents realize: driving with four or more teenagers in the vehicle. Nearly 70 percent of parents say their teens do not drive with such a carload; however, more than 40 percent of teens say they do. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, crash rates rise significantly as the number of passengers increases.

For example, in 1999 there were 6.3 accidents per 10,000 trips for 16- and 17-year-old drivers with three or more passengers in the car, and only 3.3, 2.3, and 1.6 accidents with two, one, or zero passengers, respectively. For 18- and 19-year-olds, the rate of accidents per 10,000 trips is 2.1 with three or more passengers, and 1.8, 1.2, and 1.0 when there are two, one, or zero passengers, respectively.

The study reveals that teens whose parents talk with them about driving behaviors are more likely not to drive with four or more teenage passengers in the vehicle (62 percent) than are teens who do not talk to their parents about driving behaviors (49 percent). “Consistent with prior findings, there is a ‘reality gap’ between parents and teens when it comes to teen driving behaviors,” said Wallace. “But the data shows that family discussions about driving behaviors can significantly decrease such activity.”

### Tools to Help Family Communications

SADD and Liberty Mutual make available several parent-child communication tools that help teens make good decisions about driving behaviors:

- SADD’s Contract for Life and the “Opening Lifesaving Lines” brochure, both available by calling SADD at 877-SADD-INC or by visiting SADD’s Web site at [www.sadd.org](http://www.sadd.org)
- Liberty Mutual’s “Avoiding Collisions: How to Survive the Teenage Driving Years” video and brochure, available from a local Liberty Mutual sales office or by calling 1-800-4-LIBERTY
- SADD/Liberty Mutual “Guidelines for Good Family Communication” brochure, available online from SADD at [www.sadd.org](http://www.sadd.org) and Liberty Mutual at [www.libertymutualinsurance.com](http://www.libertymutualinsurance.com)

More information about the SADD/Liberty Mutual survey results is available online at [www.libertymutualinsurance.com](http://www.libertymutualinsurance.com) or [www.sadd.org](http://www.sadd.org).

SADD, Inc. (Students Against Destructive Decisions/Students Against Driving Drunk) sponsors peer-to-peer education and prevention programs in middle schools and high schools nationwide.

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