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SUMMER DRIVING STATISTICS THAT MAY BRING TEENS TO A HALT

Annual Liberty Mutual/SADD Teen Driving Study Reveals Potential Reasons for High Summer Fatality Rate

BOSTON (July 23, 2003) – Oh, to be a teenager with a car during the summer. No school, late nights, and the joys of cruising the highways and byways with friends.

Unfortunately, this seemingly innocent scenario turns tragic more often than most of us would like to believe. New study results from Liberty Mutual and SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) indicate that teens succumb to more risky in-vehicle behaviors during the summer months that lead to crashes, serious injuries and, oftentimes, deaths than during the school year. This data sheds light on why motor vehicle crashes remain the number-one cause of death* among young people in America.

According to the 2003 Liberty Mutual/SADD Teen Driving Study, as conducted by RoperASW:

- *More Driving* – Teen drivers average 44 percent more hours behind the wheel each week during the summer (23.6 hours) than during the school year (16.4 hours).
- *“Piling In”* – Twenty-three percent of teen drivers are more likely to drive with three or more teens in the car in the summer, compared to 6 percent of teen drivers who are more likely to do so during the school year.
- *Later Nights* – Seventy-two percent of all teens report they stay out later during the summer than the school year. Additionally, 47 percent of teen drivers are more likely to drive late at night during the summer, compared to 6 percent of teen drivers who are more likely to drive late at night during the school year.

- *Heavy Eyelids* – Twenty-four percent of teen drivers are more likely to drive when tired or sleepy during the summer, compared to 9 percent of teen drivers who are more likely to drive fatigued during the school year.

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“This is a recipe for disaster – young, inexperienced drivers spending more time behind the wheel and engaging in the risky driving behaviors that lead to accidents, serious injuries and, worse, deaths,” said Paul Condrin, Liberty Mutual executive vice president and manager, Personal Market. “And, many teen drivers – about one third according to our study – compound the problem by adding drugs and alcohol to the mix.”

Summer Driving Most Deadly for Teens

The Liberty Mutual/SADD study results provide supporting evidence of recent National Highway Traffic Safety Administration statistics that show that more teens die in car crashes during the summer months (June through September) than at any other time of the year. Of the 6,434 youth (ages 15-20) car crash fatalities in 2000, July saw more deaths (644) than did any other month, followed by June (600), September (590), and August (587).

“Piling In” Increases Risk

While there is a higher prevalence of multiple teens in a vehicle in the summer months than during the school year, “piling in” is always a concern with this age group. In fact, the survey found that only 7 percent of teens report they “never” drive with three or more teens in the car, regardless of time of year.

According to the most recent Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) study on crash rates by the number of passengers across different driver age groups, crash rates for teens rise significantly as the number of passengers increases. This is especially true for the most inexperienced drivers (16- and 17-year-olds). In 1999, 16- and 17-year-old teens driving with no passengers were involved in 1.6 crashes per 10,000 trips, yet the rate rose to 2.3 crashes with one passenger, 3.3 crashes with two passengers, and sharply to 6.3 crashes with three or more passengers in the car. This latter number is three times greater than the crash rate per 10,000 trips for 18- and 19-year-old teens driving with three or more passengers (2.1).

Night Driving a Danger

According to 2001 IIHS data, more than a quarter (27 percent) of all driving deaths of teens ages 16-19 occur between the hours of 9 p.m. and 2 a.m. Teens report they stay out later during the summer months, meaning in the absence of state licensing laws that restrict the time of day when they can drive, teens are potentially driving their vehicles in a more tired physical and mental state. Additionally, the Liberty Mutual/SADD study finds teens often drive tired or sleepy regardless of time of year, with only 20 percent of all teen drivers reporting they would “never” do this.

“These results speak to parents about the importance of setting expectations for their teen before handing over the keys to the car, discussing those expectations, and, above all, ensuring they are being met,” said Stephen Wallace, SADD Chairman & CEO. “It’s natural for parents to ‘lighten up’ during the summer when it comes to their teen’s behaviors – later curfews, fewer responsibilities, less accountability for their whereabouts. But parents need to beware of the flip side of the coin – their kids are spending much of their summers cruising around at all hours with a carload of friends.”

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Other Key Findings

The Liberty Mutual/SADD Teen Driving Study also found additional risky behaviors, regardless of time of year.

- Teens talk on a cell phone while driving: only 15 percent of teen drivers say they “never” do.
- Teens speed: only 13 percent of teen drivers say they “never” do.

Solutions for Families

Liberty Mutual and SADD make available several parent-teen communication tools to help teens make good decisions about their driving behaviors.

- “Avoiding Collisions: How to Survive the Teenage Driving Years” is a driving safety program focusing on four areas of driving safety – safety belt use, speeding, night driving, and driving under the influence of drugs and alcohol. The program offers families a free 15-minute video and brochure that are available by calling a local Liberty Mutual office or 1-800-4-LIBERTY. Liberty Mutual lists its local sales offices at www.libertymutualinsurance.com.
- SADD’s Contract for Life and “Opening Lifesaving Lines” brochure are both available at www.sadd.org.
- The SADD/Liberty Mutual “Guidelines for Good Family Communication” brochure is also available online at both sites.

About the Study/Methodology

Liberty Mutual and SADD annually collaborate on *Teens Today*, a program that studies and reports on teens’ behaviors, attitudes, and decision-making about issues such as driving, drinking, drug use, sexual activity, and family/peer relationships and provides solutions for families to address these issues. A subset of the *Teens Today* project is the Liberty Mutual/SADD Teen Driving Study, which in 2003 reports on the completion of a total of 2,753 self-administered

surveys by middle and high school students in grades 6-12. Responses specific to driving behaviors are based on the responses of 319 students with a valid driver's license. RoperASW designed the surveys and administered them in a nationwide cross-section of 46 schools (25 middle schools, 21 high schools) between May 6 and June 18, 2003. The sampling error for the study at the 95 percent confidence level is +/- 3 percentage points for the total sample and +/- 6 percentage points for the driver sample. Additional findings from qualitative research (focus groups and individual interviews) designed and conducted by Atlantic Research, Inc., in April 2003 were used in the development of the student survey.

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SADD, Inc. sponsors peer-to-peer education and prevention programs in middle schools and high schools nationwide.

Boston-based Liberty Mutual Group is one of the largest multi-line insurers in the North American property and casualty industry. Offering a wide range of products and services, Liberty Mutual is a top-10 provider of private passenger auto and homeowners insurance.

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* Source – National Highway Traffic Safety Administration