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TEENS “INHERIT” PARENTS’ BAD DRIVING HABITS

Annual Liberty Mutual/SADD Teen Driving Study Shows Parent Driving Behaviors Mirrored by Their Kids

BOSTON (August 10, 2004) – High school and middle school students overwhelmingly say their parents are or will be the biggest influence on how they drive, but the practices many teens say they are emulating represent some of the riskiest driving behaviors, according to the 2004 Liberty Mutual/SADD Teen Driving Study.

“Nearly 60 percent of high school students say their parents are the biggest influence on their driving, and 69 percent of middle school students say parents will be the biggest influence when they do drive,” said Liberty Mutual Executive Vice President Paul Condrin. “So when we engage in unsafe driving behaviors, it’s no wonder they are inheriting our bad habits behind the wheel.”

Almost two thirds (62 percent) of high school teens surveyed by Liberty Mutual and SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) say their parents talk on a cell phone while driving. Almost half, 48 percent, say their parents speed, and 31 percent say their parents don’t wear a safety belt.

Not surprisingly, given the study’s finding that many young drivers are influenced by their parents’ driving habits, teens say they now follow, or expect to follow, these same practices in roughly the same percentages when they become drivers.

- Sixty-two percent of high school drivers say they talk on a cell phone while driving, and approximately half of high school teens who do not yet drive (52 percent) and middle school students (47 percent) expect they will engage in this behavior when they begin driving.
- Sixty-seven percent of high school drivers say they speed. Interestingly, most high school teens (65 percent) who do not yet drive and middle school students (79 percent) say they would not speed once they got their license.

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- Thirty-three percent of high school drivers say they do not wear their safety belt while driving. High school students who do not yet drive (28 percent) and middle school students (20 percent) are less likely to believe they will drive while not wearing a safety belt.

“It is critically important that parents set the example they wish their children to follow. Parents should not be afraid to establish expectations for their young drivers, discuss those expectations frequently, and ensure they are being met,” said Stephen Wallace, SADD Chairman and CEO. “Five years of Liberty Mutual and SADD research repeatedly shows that teens who have regular communication with their parents about expected behaviors are less likely to make destructive decisions.”

Parental influence on teen drivers may help explain a clear disconnect between how teens view themselves as drivers and their actual driving habits. Nearly nine out of 10 teens (89 percent) describe themselves as safe drivers. Yet many engage in risky behaviors that often lead to crashes, including speeding, neglecting to use safety belts, and talking on a cell phone. What’s more, many teens don’t view these behaviors as dangerous, again suggesting that they believe they are safe because their parents drive the same way.

- Twenty-seven percent of all high school students and 33 percent of middle school students think speeding is safe.
- Twenty-five percent all high school students and 29 percent of middle school students say driving without a safety belt is safe.
- Twenty-four percent of high school students and 32 percent of middle school students say talking on a cell phone while driving is safe.

"The inability among teens to appreciate how unsafe their common driving behaviors are is alarming, yet not surprising, given the fact that parents and other influencing adults exhibit the same dangerous habits," said Kathryn Swanson, chair of the Governors Highway Safety Association. "The Liberty Mutual/SADD report reminds all parents that we need to be diligent in both telling and showing our children the safest way to drive."

Safety Facts

Government and institutional data reveal why it is critically important that projects like the 2004 Liberty Mutual/SADD Teen Driving Study continue to draw attention to poor driving habits in the U.S.

- *Speeding* – According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, speeding is a factor in 31 percent of all fatal crashes, killing an average of 1,000 Americans each month, and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reports speeding is involved in 37 percent of all young driver deaths.

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- *Safety Belt Use* – Nearly four in five drivers (79 percent) in the U.S. wore their safety belts in 2003, according to NHTSA, yet safety belt use was only 60 percent in vehicle crashes involving fatalities. NHTSA estimates safety belt use by drivers and occupants saved more than 14,000 lives that year.
- *Cell Phone Use* – While cell phone use as a cause of distracted driving-related accidents is not extensive, NHTSA says drivers in a self-reported study estimated nearly 300,000 crashes from 1998-2002 were the result of cell phone use.

Solutions for Families

Liberty Mutual and SADD make available several parent-teen communication tools to help teens make good decisions about their driving behaviors. Call 1-800-4-LIBERTY for the free video “Avoiding Collisions: How to Survive the Teenage Driving Years” and visit www.libertymutualinsurance.com for more information about how to keep teens safe on the road. SADD’s Contract for Life and the “Opening Lifesaving Lines” brochure and the SADD/Liberty Mutual “Guidelines for Good Family Communications” brochure are available at www.sadd.org.

About the Study/Methodology

The Liberty Mutual/SADD Teen Driving Study is a subset of their annual *Teens Today* project – a program that studies and reports on teens’ behaviors, attitudes, and decision-making about such issues as driving, drinking, drug use, sexual activity and family/peer relationships and provides solutions for families to address these issues. This year’s study reports on the completion of a total of 3,574 self-administered surveys by middle and high school students in grades 6-12. Atlantic Research and Consulting, Inc. designed the surveys and administered them in a nationwide cross-section of 41 schools (21 middle schools, 20 high schools) between May 10 and June 14, 2004. The sampling error for the study at the 95 percent confidence level is $\pm 1.3\%$.

About Liberty Mutual and SADD

“Helping people live safer, more secure lives” since 1912, Boston-based Liberty Mutual Group is a leading global multi-line group of insurance companies whose largest line of business is personal auto. Offering a wide range of products and services, Liberty Mutual is the eighth-largest provider of personal auto and homeowners insurance in the U.S.

SADD, Inc., founded in 1981, is the nation’s premier peer-to-peer education and prevention organization and currently sponsors 10,000 chapters in middle schools and high schools nationwide.