



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 20, 2009

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OMG! TEENS CAN WIN BIG IN “DON’T TEXT AND DRIVE” TV COMMERCIAL CHALLENGE

Contest Gives Teens the Opportunity to Educate Peers about Dangers of Texting and Driving

ST. PAUL — Minnesota teens can give the thumbs down to texting while driving through the Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS) and AAA Minnesota/Iowa *Don't Text and Drive, Teens! TV Commercial Challenge*. Minnesota teens in grades 9–12 are eligible to create and produce a 30-second TV spot to communicate the dangers associated with driving while texting and the solutions to avoid the dangerous and illegal behavior. Since August 2008, texting, emailing, composing messages and web browsing has been illegal for drivers of all ages with fines up to \$300.

DPS, AAA Minnesota/Iowa and a teen panel will select the top spots in spring 2010 for an online voting period. AAA Minnesota/Iowa will award first, second and third place finishers with \$1,000, \$600 and \$400, respectively. The winning spot will make its television broadcast premiere in spring 2010. Rules and entry forms are online at www.dps.state.mn.us/ots. Spots are due to DPS by April 19, 2010.

“The purpose of this contest is to engage teens in thinking about and addressing a growing traffic safety issue,” says Gordy Pehrson, youth traffic safety coordinator of DPS Office of Traffic Safety. “The spots teens develop are relevant because peer-to-peer communication is more likely to change teen driving behavior than more traditional communication methods.”

Traffic crashes remain the leading cause of death for teens — a group overrepresented each year due to driver inexperience, risk-taking behavior, distractions, nighttime driving, speeding and seat belt non-use. DPS reports that crashes in which distraction or inattention were factors — including texting or cell phone use — are vastly underreported. During 2006–2008, 118 teens (ages 16–19), were killed and another 577 were seriously injured in crashes. Each year in Minnesota, distraction is a factor in around 25 percent of all crashes.

“Texting requires the use of both your hands and eyes — and so does driving. Doing both behind the wheel puts yourself, your passengers and other motorists on the road at risk,” says Pehrson. “Driving may seem like a routine activity, but it requires complete attention and focus.”

In a 2008 DPS teen driving survey, respondents said texting was their biggest distraction while driving. Texting was also cited as the “most unsafe” behavior their friends engaged in while driving.

Pehrson recommends teens put their cell phone out of reach when behind the wheel and encourages passengers to handle calls and texts for drivers to reduce distraction. He also reminds teens and their parents that cell phone use for drivers with a provisional license is prohibited by law.

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