

**NEW DRIVERS**  
**EXPERTS SAY PARENTS CAN PLAY AN EVEN**  
**GREATER ROLE IN TRAINING**

**BILL SEYMOUR:** Welcome to DMV Infocast, an audio production of the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles. This is Bill Seymour, Infocast Editor.

Every day scores of teenagers come to the DMV to take their permit test or to take their final road and knowledge test that lead to obtaining a driver's license. For many teenagers having that license represents a new-found freedom. It is also a very real sign of the beginning of their passage into adulthood, and that's a real sign for their parents. But having that license comes with much responsibility. It all centers on knowing how to operate a vehicle properly and safely on our roads and with passengers. The understanding of that begins with training.

The **FAITH LAPATOR** of America recently looked at training for teen drivers. Teenage traffic accidents are the leading cause of death among teens in the United States. To change this statistic, many states, including Connecticut, have adopted laws that put restrictions on young drivers. But experts say parents can play an even greater role in steering their teens to safety behind the wheel. Here's that report from FAITH LAPATOR of America.

**FAITH LAPATOR:** Traffic accidents are the leading cause of death among teens in the United States. To change this statistic, many states have adopted laws that put restrictions on young drivers. But experts say parents can play an even greater role in steering their teens to safety behind the wheel.

Every year millions of American teens get behind the wheel of a car for the first time.

**SARAH:** I started practicing driving a little bit after I turned 15, and I had my full license when I was 16.

**FAITH LAPATOR:** Sarah, now 20, says her learner's permit allowed her to practice driving with an adult in the front seat with her.

**SARAH:** I practiced with my father most of the time. First, we started in parking lots and then we started practicing on local roads, and gradually we built up to highways.

**FAITH LAPATOR:** To Sarah, like most teenagers, driving a car meant freedom. However, she says she was very careful not to repeat her older sister's mistakes.

**SARAH:** She had a rather unfortunate incident a few weeks after she got her license wherein she briefly fell asleep at the wheel and crashed into a neighbor's car. So I learned from her that you shouldn't drive when you're too tired. Stay within 10 miles of the speed limit.

**FAITH LAPATOR:** But a lot of teens never learn that lesson according to **Timothy Smith**. As a certified driving instructor, he's always been concerned about teen safety behind the wheel. He interviewed dozens of parents, teens, driving instructors, and police officers to find out why the teen accident rate is so high.

**TIMOTHY SMITH:** The primary cause, in my opinion, is simply because we do not train our teen drivers adequately enough in this country. 80% of all teen driver crashes are caused by driver error. And that's a stunning statistic.

**FAITH LAPATOR:** In his book, *Crashproof Your Kids*, Smith presents a series of behind-the-wheel exercises designed to improve a teen's driving skills. He says today driving has become more complicated and risky than ever.

**TIMOTHY SMITH:** When we learned to drive, we had far less traffic, less road rage and far less distractions. Think about all of the electronic devices we've invited into our automobiles; televisions and VCR and DVD recorders, ipods, laptops. It's astonishing. I've seen people text message on their cell phone to other teens while driving. To help reduce those distractions, eliminate them in the beginning stages of your teen learning to drive, at least the first three to six months.

**FAITH LAPATOR:** Smith says he believes that laws to regulate young driver's activities in the car can have a major impact on teen crash rates.

**TIMOTHY SMITH:** The vast majority of states out there now, over forty, now have some kind of graduated licensing laws. And some of the laws that are now being passed by states increase the driving age, increase the amount of hours of parental supervision, ban the use of cell phones. These are all really positive developments.

**FAITH LAPATOR:** Maryland is considered a model for tougher teen driving laws. Delegate William Bronrot sponsored legislation that was enacted last year.

**WILLIAM BRONROT:** The legislation strengthened our teen driving laws by restricting cell phone use and also requiring more behind-the-wheel practice time during driver's education, and at the same time, restricting the number of passengers driven by teenagers who are new drivers.

**FAITH LAPATOR:** Bronrot says the rash of teen driving deaths in his communities was a huge wake-up call.

**WILLIAM BRONROT:** I think that most parents were very supportive of these laws, and even a surprising number of teenagers got involved in helping the bills pass because I think that they recognize that this is the number one threat to their lives as well.

**FAITH LAPATOR:** Though it's still too early to measure the effect of these new laws in reducing the teen crash rates in Maryland, a recent study by Johns Hopkins University found that the state with the toughest rules had the fewest teen fatalities.

Lee Hui Chen was one of the researchers.

**LEE HUI CHEN:** We took crash involvement rates of 16-year-old drivers for both states with graduated licensing laws compared to those without. We found on average there's 11% reduction crash involvement for 16-year-old drivers with graduated license program. We were encouraging states to have comprehensive graduated licensing programs that include some sort of age restriction and nighttime restriction and passenger restriction.

**FAITH LAPATOR:** However, Maryland delegate, William Bronrot notes that tougher laws alone will not solve this problem.

**WILLIAM BRONROT:** I think that we need parents to play a stronger role in overseeing their children's driving. We need parents to be involved and making sure that their children are abiding by the laws.

**FAITH LAPATOR:** Driving expert Timothy Smith agrees. He says parents have to teach their kids safe driving behaviors and set down rules before handing over the car keys to a teenager. He recommends that parents start doing that early on by setting a good example and being safe and courteous drivers themselves. I'm Faith Lapator.

**BILL SEYMOUR:** This has been a DMV Infocast brought to you by the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles, copyright 2006 all rights reserved.