

New Liberty Mutual/SADD Study Reveals Assertive Teen Passengers Can Curb Dangerous Teen Driving Behaviors Such as Street Racing

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<?xml version="1.0"?> New Liberty Mutual/SADD Study Reveals Assertive Teen Passengers Can Curb Dangerous Teen Driving Behaviors Such as Street Racing Study shows low percentage of teen passengers speaking up against risky drivers, despite the positive effect it would have Parents and Teens can develop responsible driving habits by visiting www.LibertyMutualTeenDriving.com BOSTON, Oct. 20

BOSTON, Oct. 20 /PRNewswire/ -- Street racing has been a part of American pop culture for nearly 70 years, glamorized by movies such as "Rebel Without a Cause," "Grease" and "The Fast and the Furious." But would the movies have been as popular if there were a passenger in the car telling the driver to slow down? As teens flood the roadways this fall for such social activities as high school football games and Halloween parties, a new teen driving study by Liberty Mutual Insurance and SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) reveals that 87 percent of teen drivers would refrain from street racing if they were asked by their passengers -- an activity that resulted in 804 deaths between 2001 and 2006, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Unfortunately, only 57 percent of teen passengers say they would actually request the driver to stop racing other cars.

Interestingly, the study of 3,580 tenth, eleventh and twelfth-graders representing 29 high schools across the country also reveals that more than one third (38 percent) of teen drivers admit they have engaged in street racing, despite 73 percent of those drivers also reporting they feel the behavior is at least "somewhat dangerous." This increased frequency of street racing is spurring some states -- including Massachusetts, California and Illinois -- to revisit or introduce laws to protect teen drivers and others on the road.

"The results from this study reveal that teens continue to take risks behind the wheel, yet their friends could have a greater impact in reducing those activities -- if only they felt empowered to speak up," said Dave Melton, director of Transportation Technical Consulting Services at the Liberty Mutual Research Institute for Safety in Hopkinton, Mass. "Racing, texting while driving, talking on the cell phone -- there is a preponderance of so many behaviors and distractions that it is becoming alarmingly rare to find drivers who squarely focus on the one thing they should: the road."

Say "No" to Peer Pressure - Passengers, Speak Up!

The Liberty Mutual/SADD survey reveals that street racing is just one example of dangerous teen driving behavior that could be minimized by passenger intervention. Texting while driving, an increasingly popular activity that 73 percent of teens admit they have done, is another stark example: 76 percent of texting-while-driving offenders admit they would stop if asked by the passenger, yet only 46 percent of teen passengers say they would speak up. And even fewer teens say they would ask the driver to curb other dangerous behaviors, such as speeding (41 percent) and talking on a cell phone (18 percent).

Street Racing Laws Empower Passengers with Convincing Argument

States such as Massachusetts, California, and Illinois are passing legislation with tougher penalties for street racers, and according to SADD Chairman and CEO Stephen Wallace, teen passengers who understand these laws can make a stronger case against street racing to drivers.

"Even when a teen passenger knows the right thing to do, peer pressure makes it tough to speak up when friends are on the verge of engaging in dangerous behavior," says Wallace. "However, when armed with facts about street racing laws and penalties -- which include jail time and license suspensions -- teen passengers can make a stronger, more confident and convincing argument against street racing."

Wallace points to the following state laws with strict repercussions designed to curb street racing:

-- In California, drivers convicted for street racing face prison sentences of 30 days to 6 months, and/or as much as \$1,000 in fines, if their offenses resulted in injury for someone other than themselves.

-- In Massachusetts, a new law effective in February 2008 dictates that convicted street racers be punished with up to 2 1/2 years of jail time or a fine of up to \$1,000. Offenders also get their licenses suspended for up to 30 days for the first offense, and 180 days for subsequent violations.

-- In Illinois, current legislation states that driving privileges be revoked for any person convicted of street racing and that law enforcement may impound the offender's vehicle for up to five days.

For more information and tips for being responsible and safe on the road, parents and teens can visit www.LibertyMutualTeenDriving.com, an interactive teen driving resource created by Liberty Mutual. The website offers activities to help teens cultivate responsible driving habits, including online tutorials and demonstrations on accident prevention techniques formulated by the Liberty Mutual Research Institute for Safety and visual demonstrations on parallel parking. The site also gives visitors an exclusive 50 percent discount on the National Safety Council's defensive driving course, and provides drivers-in-training with sample driver's licensing exam questions from every state.

The dual-path site also features a parents' version, with useful tips for talking with their teens about driving. A new parent/teen safe driving contract, developed by SADD, can facilitate this discussion and enables parents and teens to customize consequences and rewards for driving behaviors including wearing seat belts, following the speed limit, and limiting or reducing driving distractions. Teens also can visit www.sadd.org for more strategies and tips for speaking up and positively influencing their peers.

Methodology

Liberty Mutual and SADD commissioned Guideline, Inc. to conduct a qualitative and a quantitative survey to measure teen driving attitudes and behaviors. The study was initiated with a series of six focus groups held in San Antonio, Baltimore, and Charleston, S.C., the week of March 3, 2008. The study also involved surveying a total of 3,580 teens in tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades from 29 randomly recruited high schools across the country. These findings can be interpreted with a 95 percent confidence interval with an error margin of +/- 1.3 percent. Analysis of survey subgroups such as licensed drivers (approximately 2 percent) are subject to wider error margins. Data was also weighted to ensure the proper demographic breakdown of respondents in relation to geographical location, grade level, and gender.

About Liberty Mutual Group

"Helping people live safer, more secure lives" since 1912, Boston-based Liberty Mutual Group is a diversified global insurer and sixth-largest property and casualty insurer in the U.S. based on 2007 direct written premium. Liberty Mutual Group ranks 94th on the Fortune 500 list of largest U.S. corporations, based on 2007 revenue. The company has over 41,000 employees located in more than 900 offices throughout the world.

The eighth-largest auto and home insurer in the U.S., Liberty Mutual (www.libertymutual.com) sells full lines of coverage for automobile, homeowners, valuable possessions, personal liability, and individual life insurance. The company is an industry leader in affinity partnerships, offering car and home insurance to employees and members of more than 10,000 companies, credit unions, professional associations and alumni groups.

About SADD

For more than 27 years, SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) has been committed to empowering young people to lead education and prevention initiatives in their schools and communities. Founded as Students Against Drunk Driving in 1981, SADD has become the nation's preeminent peer-to-peer youth education, prevention and activism organization, with nearly 10,000 chapters in middle schools, high schools, and colleges nationwide. SADD now highlights prevention of many destructive behaviors that are harmful to young people, including underage drinking, substance abuse, risky and impaired driving, and teen violence and suicide.

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