

NEWS RELEASE

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For immediate release

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A Hemingford High School group, working with the student council, has created a video, posted online, showing the potential fatal results of texting while driving. To see the video, go to <http://www.pphd.org/JSTDRV.html>. The teen group presented the video to a student assembly last week, as part of a local **JUST DRIVE (JST DRV)** promotion.

Box Butte County teens are among the highest in the state for vehicle accidents due to distracted driving (texting). As an incentive to help teens quit texting while driving, students are asked to sign the **JST DRV** online pledge. Panhandle Public Health District will work with leadership groups in Alliance and Hemingford high schools to implement the Just Drive Campaign to encourage students 9-12 to take the pledge.

Both **JST DRV** leadership teams will receive a \$500 stipend for participating in the program. An additional \$250 incentive will go to the high school class in each community with the largest percentage of students taking the pledge. Participating students, including the leadership team, must take a pledge to avoid distracted driving, not to text, make or take cell phone calls while driving. In addition, the simple, one-page pledge will include language to prevent other distractions such as loud music, speeding, drinking and singing or dancing.

The campaign includes focus groups with student leaders and the dissemination of campaign materials. Campaign marketing tools will include vinyl clings and magnets for school lockers, notebooks, laptops and perhaps the cell phones themselves. Lastly, **JST DRV** participants can download the app, sign the pledge, view student-created podcasts and track the competition data through the PPHD website and a Facebook **JST DRV** fan page.

Among all age groups, teen drivers are at the greatest risk. Per mile driven, teen drivers are four times more likely than adult drivers to crash. Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for teens. Contributing factors include driver inexperience, driving with teen passengers, nighttime driving, not wearing seat belts and distracted driving. Teens report these distractions: other teens in car (93%), loud music in car (85%), passenger/driver dancing or singing (79%), passengers acting wild (69%), loud younger kids in car (67%), passengers have been drinking alcohol (48%), passengers get driver to speed (45%) and passenger have been smoking pot (38%).

To keep teens safe on the road, the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention recommends graduated driver licensing policies, prohibiting cell phone use for teen drivers, primary enforcement of seat belt laws and vigorous enforcement of the zero tolerance policies for underage drinking and driving. ***"It is the dynamic combination of increased enforcement and public education that has proved effective in changing behavior,"*** reports the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Nebraska has a graduated licensing system for drivers beginning with a school learner's permit, graduating to a school permit, learner's permit and then a provisional operator's license. However, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety reports when parents are watching their teenage children drive differently than when they're alone or with friends. Unsupervised teens take more risks behind the wheel.

In Nebraska, LB945 was approved by the governor in April 2010. It bans all cell phone use for novice drivers (under age 18, with a learner's permit or graduated driver's license) and bans texting for all drivers. Both offenses are primary offenses, so a driver can be pulled over and cited for the offense without first committing another (driving) infraction.

PPHD will also use an ancillary educational promotion campaign from the CDC, "*Parents Are the Key*" to get adults involved in teen driving through these proven facts:

- practice driving with the teen
- parent-teen driving agreements to set the rules of the road
- parents must lead by example (modeling safe driving behaviors)
- share information/support on Facebook.

For additional information about distracted driving, visit www.pphd.org. The purpose of the Panhandle Public Health District is to educate the region it serves about the prevention of epidemics, spread of contagious diseases, injury, illness and disability. The district is charged with promoting and encouraging healthy behaviors. They promote the quality and accessibility of health services and protection against environmental hazards. Through education, protection and promotion of these issues, the Panhandle Public Health District believes the quality of life of the residents they serve can be greatly improved.