

# Teens learn dangers of texting while driving

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In this May 6, 2010 photo, Capt. Drew Bloom of the Vermont Department of Motor Vehicles, left, rides along with 10th-grader Trevor Nadeau during a texting while driving event in White River Junction, Vt. While states pass laws banning texting while driving, some are going a step further, giving kids first-hand experience of the dangers of sending electronic messages while behind the wheel. They're sending kids through obstacle courses on golf carts while texting, keeping track of how many errors and fatalities they may cause. (AP Photo/Toby Talbot)

(AP) -- Kamy Mayott has been told that texting while driving is dangerous. But the 15-year-old didn't know just how dangerous until she navigated a golf cart through an obstacle course while texting and took

out a whole row of orange cones.

"It definitely taught me to be careful and not to text while driving because I'm going to kill somebody," Mayott said.

So far 25 states have banned texting while driving, but many are going a step further, sending kids through similar courses, so they can see the errors, accidents and fatalities they could cause. Officials hope the reality will alleviate the temptation to send an electronic message to a friend while behind the wheel.

"It's pretty eye opening for the kids," said David Teater, senior director of transportation initiatives for the National Safety Council in Itasca, Ill. "They're very unsuccessful at texting and navigating the cones."

The NSC estimates that 28 percent of crashes - or 1.6 million per year - are caused by [cell phone](#) use, either talking or texting.

Drivers who use cell phones are four times more likely to be in a crash, while drivers who text increase that risk to 8 to 23 times, the NRC said.

People shouldn't be messing with cell phones when they're trying to drive," said Drew Bloom, captain of the Vermont Department of Motor Vehicle enforcement, who brought the obstacle course idea to Vermont after hearing about it in North Carolina. "We're finding a 400 percent average increase in driving errors. ... So when you have a 400 percent increase in amount of mistakes you're making and your [reaction time](#) slows dramatically, the proof is in data."

The teens drive through the course once, and then a second time while texting to a friend on the side lines. It gives them hands-on experience that authorities hope will sink in.

"If we can reach one teen out of five teens who won't text and drive then they could possibly save their life in the future," said Sgt. Jeff Gordon, public information office for the Highway Patrol in North Carolina, which has seen a rise in teen fatalities.

Motor vehicle departments and driver's education courses around the country hope to plant the no texting message early, while teens are just learning the rules of the road.

"This age group from 15 to 20 represents about 15 percent of licensed drivers in Vermont yet they're involved in almost 30 percent of the crashes. So they're prone to crashing anyway. If you add texting and electronic devices and those sorts of things then the probability goes up dramatically," said Skip Allen, executive director of the Youth Safety Council in Vermont, which passed a law this month banning texting while driving.

The Turn Off Texting campaign brought the golf cart event to five schools in Vermont this spring, and plans to get to three more before the end of the school year.

Many teen drivers, who must be accompanied by a parent in the car until they get their licenses, already are prohibited from texting.

"It's a big no, no," said Corissa Peterson, 16, of Hartford. "I put my phone on silent and put it in my step dad's pocket."

Trever Nadeau, 16, of Sharon, sometimes brings his cell phone with him but doesn't answer.

After running through the obstacle course, he said he won't text.

"I did horrible. I got like one mistake the first time, eleven the second,"

Nadeau said.

Hannah Chambers, 16, already knew something about the dangers of texting while driving. Her older cousin went off the road and hit a tree while [texting](#).

But the 16-year-old was still surprised at how hard it was to text and navigate through the tight turns, and stop signs.

If she's in a car with a driver who texts, she tells them to pull over or hand the phone to her to send the message.

"The driver needs to pay attention to the road not their cell phone," she said.

**More information:** Turn Off Texting, <http://www.turnofftexting.com>

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