

New safety campaign

Teenagers, 'Don't drive stupid'

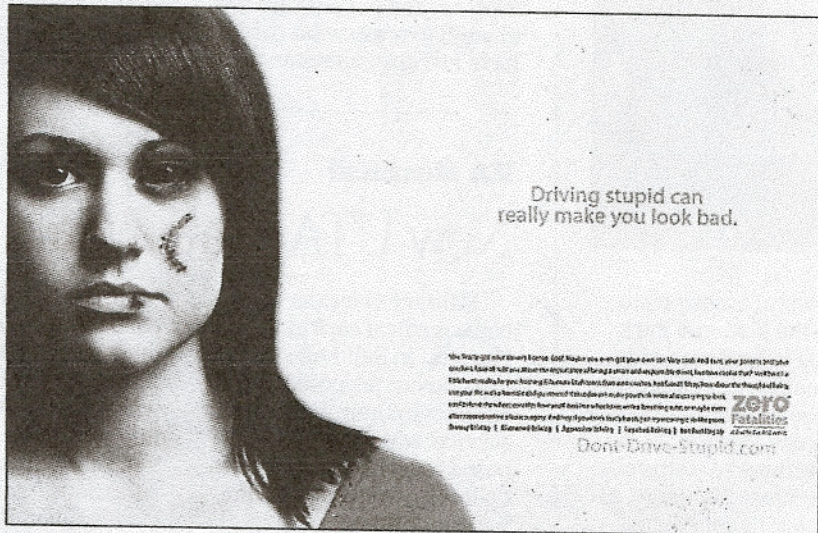
Program hopes to curb risky behaviors, such as text messaging while in the car

By PATTY HENETZ
The Salt Lake Tribune

Hitting the windshield with your face while driving at top speed hurts a bunch and can turn a nice smile into an ugly mug.

It may sound harsh, but the state's new "Don't Drive Stupid" campaign aimed at teen drivers hopes its signature photo of a teen girl with a cheek stitched up like a baseball will shock young motorists enough to change risky behavior.

"Most kids really do drive



SOURCE: UDOT

The Utah Department of Transportation has come up with a direct appeal to teenagers to pay attention and avoid risky activities while driving.

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Teens told, 'Don't drive stupid'

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stupid," said Millard High School student Kristi Alldredge, 17. "You have music in the car, or you're talking to someone, [and] you veer off the road."

With teenage drivers involved in more than a quarter of all collisions in the state each year, the Utah Department of Transportation hopes students like Kristi can spread the message. Officials also hope teens will take personally the information and images on its Web site, dont-drive-stupid.com.

Motor vehicle crashes are the single greatest cause of

teen death, said Robert Hull, UDOT's director of traffic and safety. Teens represent only 8 percent of drivers but their inexperience makes them dangerous, especially when they are drowsy, distracted, aggressive, impaired or not wearing seat belts.

This is true of adult drivers, too, but teens put their own twist on risky behavior, with the latest being reading and composing text messages while driving.

Cade Hunter, 18, a classmate of Kristi's in Fillmore and the president of the National Student Safety Program, said most of his friends text message while driving.

Mekynzie Giles, 17, state safety chair for the Governing Youth Council, found out how dangerous that can be one day while text messaging as she drove down the two-mile dirt road to her home. No one else was on the road. "I looked up and almost ran into a big telephone pole right there," she

said. "I spun around in a circle." Since then, she doesn't even talk on her phone while driving, she said.

Driving is considered an overlearned skill in adults. That is, the longer you drive, the more reflexive your responses to road hazards, Hull said.

Teenagers haven't yet had time to develop those reflexes, though some may argue the point.

"Some people are overconfident," said Giles. "The best drivers can make the littlest mistake that can kill them."

That's why seven state agencies, Primary Children's Medical Center, the Salt Lake Valley Health Department, the Central Utah Public Health Department and Emergency Medical Services for Children have joined to develop a statewide program with a single message they hope will appeal to teens.

If adults don't like the "Don't drive stupid"

catchphrase but teenagers do, all the better.

Hull conducted an unscientific market test with some teens hanging around a school parking lot.

When he told them the slogan, they laughed but agreed it would work.

"I like the picture at the top of the [Web] page," said Hunter. "It shows it could happen to anybody. She looks like a nice girl and she has this big, old gash on her face. It gets the point across."

Added Kristi, "It really does hit home."

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