

LIBERTY MUTUAL/SADD STUDY SHOWS 90 PERCENT OF TEENS ADMIT STRONGER LIKELIHOOD OF DRINKING AND DRIVING ON PROM NIGHT

Each year, spring school rituals such as prom and graduation begin with so much excitement and promise yet end in tragedy for hundreds of teen drivers and their passengers. New research from Liberty Mutual Insurance and SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) suggests this season could be no different. According to a national survey of more than 2,500 eleventh and twelfth graders, 90 percent of teens believe their counterparts are more likely to drink and drive on prom night and 79 percent believe the same is true for graduation night. Yet, that belief does not translate to concern, as only 29 percent and 25 percent of teens say that driving on prom night and graduation night, respectively, comes with a high degree of danger.

“Newspapers, television, YouTube and Facebook are rife with tales of tragedy from reckless driving on prom and graduation nights, yet an ‘it won’t happen to me’ attitude continues to be so pervasive among our teens,” said Dave Melton, a driving safety expert with the Liberty Mutual Research Institute for Safety. “Add to the alcohol factor distractions like texting or talking on the cell phone while driving, or the greater likelihood of multiple people in the car, and the crash potential is very real.” Real it is: there were 380 teen alcohol-related traffic deaths during prom and graduation season (April, May and June) in 2007, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. And the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety reports 1,009 total teen fatalities (alcohol and non-alcohol-related) in motor vehicle crashes during those same months in 2008.

Alarming, parents may be unwitting enablers of drinking and driving: more than one in three teens (36 percent) say their parents have allowed them to attend parties where it is known that alcohol will be served, and 14 percent say their parents have, in fact, hosted such teen gatherings. The Liberty Mutual/SADD study suggests that parents have a tremendous opportunity to enhance their role in deterring unsafe driving behaviors among teens. More than one in five teens (22 percent) say their parents have either not spoken with them about driving safety at all or have only talked with them once. Past Liberty Mutual/SADD research strongly indicates that teens who have regular conversations with their parents about driving safety are less likely to drink and drive, less likely to speed, and are more likely to wear their seat belts.

Further, more than half (52 percent) of teens admit they are not responsible for abiding by any formal or informal family driving safety rules. Yet, the opportunity certainly exists: 64 percent of teens who have not entered into any written agreement with their parents about safe driving rules say they would be willing to do so.

Indeed, 71 percent of teens say a formal safe driving agreement will increase their parents’ trust in them and more than half (55 percent) believe it would afford them more freedom. Importantly, those who do have formal driving safety rules established with their parents are significantly more likely than teens who have no family driving safety rules to say such an agreement would encourage them to change their driving habits (44 percent vs. 26 percent) and would make it easier for them to resist peer pressure when it comes to making a decision between safe and unsafe driving behaviors (58 percent vs. 42 percent).