

January 13, 2009

For Immediate Release

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A new program aims to keep young drivers safe and alive

A new program is underway to help keep Montana's youngest drivers alive while they gain experience behind the wheel. In 2009, the Montana Highway Patrol, in partnership with the National Safety Council and the Montana Department of Transportation, will premier the *Alive at 25* program. This week, 20 troopers and sergeants will be attending a 24 hour instructor training as they prepare to launch the program in the spring.

Nationwide, motor vehicle collisions are the number one cause of death for young adults *ages 16-24*. Montana's young drivers are similarly over-represented in traffic crashes, based on the number of licensed drivers. In 2007, 66 young drivers were killed on Montana's roads while 2,912 young drivers sustained injuries due to motor vehicle crashes. When Montana's young people die in preventable motor vehicle crashes, families and communities are deeply affected.

Alive at 25 is an innovative, young-driver intervention program aiming to help shape responsible, crash-free teen and college-age young drivers. The course has proven effective in other states, such as Colorado where the under 20-year fatality rate has dropped 20% since adopting the *Alive at 25* Program.

The program uses a highly interactive format that guides students to come to their own conclusions on why young drivers behind the wheel are at high risk. A teen's risk of being in a car crash is at a lifetime high in their first 1 to 2 years of driving. With one teen passenger in the vehicle, the risk of a crash increases by 50 percent. Candid conversations address potentially deadly issues such as speeding, text messaging while driving, driving aggressively, fatigue, driving while impaired, and failing to buckle up. The students formulate their own ideas and solutions for reducing their exposure to these risks.

Alive at 25 also includes a Parent Program to help parents reinforce basic driving skills and good decision-making to help their teens become responsible, crash-free drivers. The course examines Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) laws, other laws related to safety belts, speeding, alcohol and drugs, and practical solutions to reduce the risks their teens face. Most importantly, parents walk away with an effective Parent/Teen Driver Contract and the tools to engage their teens and help manage their driving experience.

The National Safety Council, a leader in driver improvement training and defensive driving for more than 40 years, developed *Alive at 25* to specifically target drivers in the 16 – 24 year age group. "The *Alive at 25* program is being used in several states and has already reached over 800,000 teens across the country. Now we want to do the same for Montana's young people," said Colonel Mike Tooley of the Montana Highway Patrol.

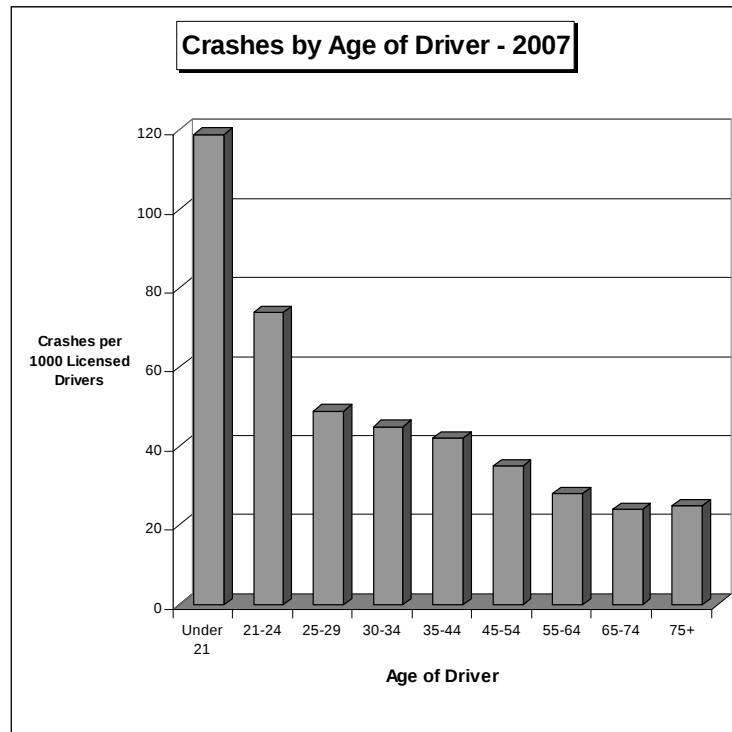
The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), through a federal grant, is funding the three-day training required to certify Montana Highway Patrol Officers to teach the curriculum. MDT will also cover costs associated with statewide implementation of the program such as workbooks and instructor training materials.

Montana Highway Patrol *Alive at 25* Instructors will be based in all eight MHP districts headquartered in Missoula, Great Falls, Butte, Billings, Glendive, Kalispell, Bozeman, and Havre. Schools, colleges, universities, judges, and community groups may schedule *Alive at 25* sessions by contacting their local MHP office. More information about *Alive at 25* is available at www.teendriver.nsc.org.

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Graphic element:



Source: Montana Department of Transportation