

CRASH

Distracted driving
leads to increased
student accidents

COURSE

by | Samantha Gonski

We don't have to do this. We can go the other way," senior Shayna Landreth's mom, Sherry Cotton, said at the sight of the flipped over truck. Tears rushed from Landreth's eyes as she flashed back to the accident she had been in just days earlier.

Memories raced through her head: her sister's arm shooting out in front of her, her quick glance over the collision. The impact tearing through her wrists, snapping her ligaments. The pain in her nose, the thumping of her head. Going unconscious while her sister called her name. Gas pouring in from the wreck. Her first car demolished, broken into pieces.

"No no," Landreth said, snapping back to the present. She glanced over at the truck she had crashed into days before. "Just keep going."

Landreth described the wreck she had had in her Saturn driving down Old Turnpike Road.

"I looked over at my sister, and then I looked back and it was the butt end of a car. For a second I thought we were going to make it, but it didn't turn out that way," Landreth recalled.

Of the West students that drive, 17 percent have been in an accident. Almost 40 percent of these students were determined to be at fault in an accident.

According to a *Wingspan* survey of 106 students, the top two distractions for West drivers are cell phones and day-dreaming.

"It's really hard when you hear your phone go off and you're in the middle of a conversation to not pick it up and continue the conversation while you're driving," senior Haley Staton said. "You don't want to leave your friends hanging."

North Carolina has a ban on all hands-on and hands-free cell phones for bus drivers and provisional drivers. Texting is not allowed for all drivers.

In the 2012 Crash Facts Report issued by North Carolina's Department of Transportation, it was reported that 1,262 people were killed and 110,406 people were

injured in accidents on state roads.

In 2012 there were seven fatalities related to crashes in Henderson County, but the highest in the most recently recorded 10 year span was 21 in 2005.

Teenage drivers have a difficult time dealing with distractions.

"I get upset when kids tell me they were speeding and lost control," Cathy Corliss, driver education and health/physical education teacher, said. "They laugh about their accidents because they got away unharmed and didn't harm anyone else. But if they killed someone and they were held accountable for that, they could go to jail. It could change their lives forever."

Corliss said she believes the top three distractions for teenage drivers are cell phones, the radio and food. The drivers education teachers do their best to teach students to avoid distractions by talking to them about the statistics, by showing educational videos and by providing instruction on how to set up a car before leaving the driveway.

"Sometimes my cell phone will ring, but it's always in my purse on the floor," Landreth said. "I don't touch it."

Thirteen to 18-year-olds are the most likely to get in a car accident in America according to the Centers

for Disease Control and Prevention. Male drivers in this age group are twice as likely to be in an accident as their female counterparts.

Available statistics show that car crashes are the leading cause of death for teenagers. When other teenagers are in the car, the risk of being in a fatal car crash is doubled.

In 2011, 3,115 teenagers died in a car accident. Fifty-one percent of these fatalities occurred in a car driven by another teen.

According to West's Driver Education Website, Level One of the Graduated Driver's License law says that for a teenager's first six months of driving after graduating from a driver education class, he or she can only drive between the hours of 5 a.m. to 9 p.m. with a supervising driver who has been licensed at the minimum of five years.

To graduate to Level Two, a student must have had no violations during the first six months of Level One driving and be 16 years of age. The teenager can then drive without a supervisor from 5 a.m. to 9 p.m. with the exception of drivers going to or from work.

These provisions were placed by the state to keep new drivers from becoming too distracted on the road, causing crashes of problems for other drivers and causing injury to themselves and their loved ones.

Corliss believes it's important that people, especially teenagers, realize the effects that distracted driving can cause. Taking precautions, gaining knowledge and spreading awareness can end the reality of distracted driving and keep the roads safer for all.

"A lot of kids are aware that we have had tragedy here at this school losing students due to accidents. I think that does make them a little more self-conscious of what they are doing. You try to tell them that they have a responsibility on the road, not only to themselves, but to other drivers," Corliss said. "If you get in an accident you're not only affecting yourself, but your immediate family, whoever else was involved in the accident, and the community."

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