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Training seeks to save teen lives Getting there: Driver's education program alters instruction to help motorists keep safety in mind

By Ben Fletcher - Idaho Press-Tribune

NAMPA — Four teenagers have died on Canyon County roads just this year — and driver's education instructors want to stop the trend.

Nampa's Leola Stout has her driver's education students keep a scrapbook about traffic crashes. Stout, who has taught driver's education for the Nampa School District for seven years, said the recent deaths hit some of her students hard.

She also plans to use a new program — sponsored by the Idaho Department of Education, Idaho Transportation Department and the Office of Highway Safety — to continue to reach out to teen drivers.

The instruction program is intended to help driver's education teachers bridge the "chasm" between traditional teaching methods and today's youth, described by many instructors who attended a Tuesday seminar as a generation raised on television and video games.

"Teens can learn the technical skills of driving and the rules of the road, but their attitudes can override their knowledge and lead to dangerous behavior," said Kelly Glenn, supervisor of driver's education for the Idaho Department of Education.

Teens have the skills and education to drive safely, and Idaho drivers instructors say the next step is to focus on their attitudes.

Tuesday, some local driver's education teachers were introduced to "The Drive Program," an interactive teaching method meant to help today's prospective drivers pay closer attention and retain more.

According to the program's developer, the Moorshire Group, teens:

- think visually
- have short attention spans
- learn by doing, not by reading
- accept peers before authority
- want it straight
- remember what they come up with, not what they're told
- do not want to be embarrassed

So instead of just textbooks and long instructional movies, the program includes hands-on work and a 67-second video that intends to show "the disconnect between a teen's self perception as a driver and his or her behavior behind the wheel."

Workbook activities give teens certain scenarios, make them write down possible ways to act and also sketch it out. At times, the students become teachers.

"It really gets them ready for something they're going to see in the driver's seat," Stout said.

Part of the problem, Glenn said, is that more teen drivers need to learn that responsibility must come with a driver's license.

"They don't understand life is not a video game," she said. "You don't get an extra life."

Local instructors said the program is another tool they can use to try to prepare teens for life after driver's education.

Instructors can receive the training during eight workshops being held throughout the spring. Stout believes teens can get the message, adding that "I've seen a big change in kids" who take driver's education courses.

Deadly numbers

Highway safety experts say 23 deaths result from 5,000 traffic crashes that involve young drivers each day in the United States.

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