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Attitude change

State tries to shift teens' opinions of driving

By Joshua Palmer
Times-News writer

TWIN FALLS -- Attitude is everything, but some fear teen drivers may have the wrong one.

Licensed drivers ages 15 to 19 make up only 7 percent of Idaho's driving population, but account for 25 percent of all wrecks, according to the Idaho Transportation Department.

So the Idaho State Department of Education and the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) Office of Highway Safety are beginning a new driver education program that they hope will help teenagers recognize how their attitudes affect their driving.

Although the rate of teen driving fatalities in Idaho is about average, vehicle accidents nationwide are the No. 1 killer of people between the ages of 15 and 24.

Starting today, driver education instructors are participating in workshops that will help them implement a new driver education program called **Drive**.

"Driver education is similar in structure to that of the '50s," said Mark Horowitz, managing director of the Moorshire Group, which created the program. "The main reason teens were crashing was not being addressed, so that is what we're doing."

But can teen attitudes be changed?

At 6:45 a.m. Thursday, more than 20 Twin Falls High School students shuffle into a classroom where high school government teacher and football coach Brock Berryhill greets the students with a driver education slideshow and reminders to stay awake.

"Everybody close your eyes without falling asleep," Berryhill said. "Now imagine you're changing lanes on Blue Lakes. What do you do?"

He scrolls through PowerPoint slides depicting driving situations while explaining the rules of driving.

This is the front line where ITD and the Department of Education want to reach students.

"I don't think we can change their attitudes," Horowitz said. "But I do know that we can modify them. All our attitudes are modified over time, so that's what we're doing."



AMEE SMITH/The Times-News
Brittini Shaw takes control of the wheel Saturday while navigating the streets of Twin Falls with her instructor Brock Berryhill. Driver's education students are required to drive six hours with their instructor, as well as 50 hours with an adult that is over the age of 21.

Although Berryhill is not trying to modify his students' attitudes, he is watching them closely.

"Some people think driving is a right, but it's not -- it's a privilege," he said. "In my class, (students) can pass based on their class work, their drives and their attitudes. If they have a bad attitude, they will probably take that behind the wheel."

And some of his students believe their attitudes can be modified.

"With the right teaching and tactics, I think you could do it," said Jacob Wheeler, 15.

The state is hoping that **Drive** will slow the steadily increasing number of teens who are killed in vehicle accidents each year.

For more information on young drivers, visit:

http://itd.idaho.gov/dmv/driverservices/young_drivers.htm

The Idaho State Department of Education and the Idaho Transportation Department Office of Highway Safety are hosting two workshops on the **Drive** program.

Today and Tuesday: Idaho Falls -- Shilo Convention Center.
7:30 to 10:30 a.m.

Thursday and Friday: Pocatello -- AmeriTel Inn. 8 a.m. to noon.