



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 31, 2017

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OPERATION SAFE PASSAGE VIII CAMPAIGN

What Will it Take for Every Teen to Arrive Alive?

Being a high school teen is an exciting time, especially as prom and graduation approach, and the school year ends. Being a teen driver adds to the excitement, but driving also carries with it some very real risk--car crashes are the leading cause of death for teens in the United States. In 2016, teens in Virginia, ages 15-19 years old, were involved in almost 21,000 crashes; 61 teens lost their lives including two teens from Louisa County. Shockingly, many teens were not following the most basic vehicle safety rule of all—wearing a seat belt. ***What will it take for every teen to Arrive Alive?***

To help teens Arrive Alive, Louisa County agencies are joining with the community to implement Operation SAFE PASSAGE, a campaign to reduce teen accidents during the high risk prom through graduation period (April 24th to May 21st). Sheriff Ashland Fortune, Chief Keith Greene, Chief Ronnie Roberts, and Principal Lee Downey want Louisa County teens to have a fun and memorable experience, but they recognize risky driving behaviors can change a fun occasion into an unforgettable tragedy. Sheriff Fortune states, "Many teens think speeding is cool or that it will impress their friends. The reality is speeding can stop teens dead in their tracks! No one is impressed by that...not their friends and certainly not their family." Knowing how important smartphones are to high school teens and that distractions lead to many crashes, Principal Downey adds, "Do whatever it takes to resist texting or using a cell phone while driving. Sending or looking at that one text isn't worth losing your life or hurting someone else."

Parents and caregivers play the most important role by reinforcing safe driving behaviors in their teens. Most teenagers will follow the example parents and other adults set. When parents and other adults follow the law, wear seat belts, and don't use electronic devices, teens are more likely to develop and follow safe driving habits.

Operation SAFE PASSAGE has two important phases and is an integral element of the Youth of Virginia Speak Out on Traffic Safety (YOVASO) Arrive Alive campaign that began March 24th at the high school. The first phase focuses on education. On Monday, April 24th, the

Transportation Safety Commission will place a wrecked vehicle on the grounds of Louisa County High School as a daily reminder to teens of the consequences of risky driving behaviors. On Tuesday, April 25th, Chief Roberts will speak to 11th and 12th grade students about safe driving behaviors and the importance of making smart choices for the future. On Wednesday, April 26th, the Department of Fire and Emergency Medical Services and the Sheriff's Office, in cooperation with Louisa County High School, will conduct a live, narrated demonstration of a teen alcohol-related traffic accident for 11th and 12th grade students. Using the live demonstration as an educational tool, students will learn the tragic consequences of impulsiveness and lack of self-control behind the wheel of a vehicle.

The second phase of Operation SAFE PASSAGE focuses on enforcement. The Virginia State Police, Sheriff's Office, and Town Police, with support from the community, will collect information on the location of gatherings where minors may be consuming alcohol. Strict enforcement will include the arrest and or summoning of minors in violation of Virginia's alcohol laws as well as any adult found contributing to, aiding, or abetting the behavior. Checkpoints and increased patrols may be utilized at various locations and times around the county to remove impaired drivers from the roadways.

Chief Greene states "County agencies are absolutely committed to keeping our teens safe and alive, but we need ALL adults, especially parents and guardians, to set safe driving examples every time they get behind the wheel. The risk of motor vehicle crashes is higher among 16-19-year-olds than any other age group and is the leading cause of death among teens. Distractions such as text messaging and phone calls account for a vast majority of these crashes and, individuals who drive while sending or reading text messages are 23 times more likely to be involved in a motor vehicle crash. Statistical information indicates that 11 teens die every day as a result of texting while driving. What's even more disturbing is that while 94% of teen drivers acknowledge the dangers of texting and driving, 43% admitted to doing it anyway! We encourage everyone to make smart choices...there is NO text message or phone call that is so important that it can't wait until you arrive at your destination or can safely stop your vehicle."

Chief Roberts adds, "We've proven time and again risky behaviors cost teens in many ways. While Operation SAFE PASSAGE is a great tool to encourage Louisa County teens to stop, think, and make smart choices for their future, nothing replaces the positive example set by adults who follow the law, wear seat belts, and don't use electronic devices while driving. Be the difference!"

***What Will It Take for Every Teen to Arrive Alive?
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