

# Teens buckle each other up

## With crashes No. 1 killer, young people take action

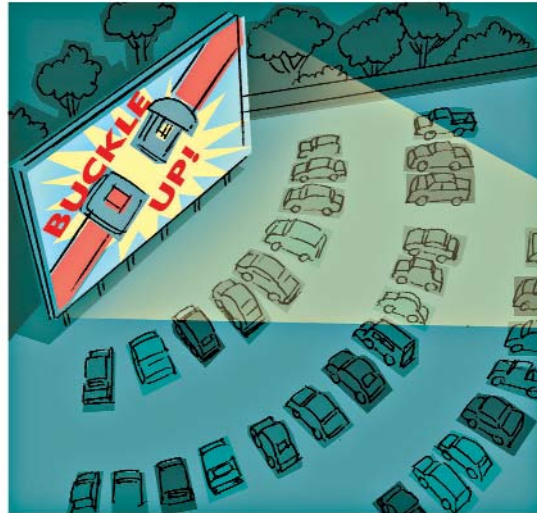
By Kim Painter  
USA TODAY

Teens pulling into the Harvest Moon Drive-In Theatre in Gibson City, Ill., this summer get something extra with their movies and popcorn: public service ads produced and performed by other local teenagers that remind them to buckle up on the ride home.

The spots, which also promote alert and sober driving, are part of a campaign that students at Gibson City-Melvin-Sibley High School started last fall for a nationwide contest sponsored by State Farm and the National Youth Leadership Council.

The campaign won the contest. More important, it may have played a role in preventing severe injuries or deaths of six local teens who were involved in crashes in the past year — all of whom were wearing seat belts, says the school's driver education teacher, Judy Weber-Jones. "I've been teaching driver's ed for 21 years and this is the only thing I've seen that works," she says. The ads, banners and prizes (for teens who are found to be wearing belts) are effective, she says, but the real power is in the source: "This is a teammate telling them to buckle up, a boyfriend or girlfriend telling them to buckle up."

It's a message many teens nationwide have yet to heed.



USA TODAY

Fewer than half of high school students in a 2005 survey by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said they always used seat belts. Ten percent said they rarely or never did.

Those numbers are improving. But still, "we know that teens have the highest crash risk and lowest seat belt use" of any age group, says Ruth Shults, a CDC researcher.

That combination is deadly. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety reports that 5,610 teens in the USA died in traffic accidents in 2004, which makes such accidents the leading cause of death, by far, for that age group. Among drivers 16 to 19 who were killed, seat belt use ranged from 46% for the youngest to 36% for the oldest.

New government data for 2005, released last week, did show a drop in traffic deaths among teen drivers and their teen passengers. But still, unsafe teen driving continues to take a tragic toll.

Experts say they don't know exactly why teens ride beltless and take other road risks. One theory is that the parts of the brain that weigh risks, make judgments and control impulses are simply immature.

It is clear that parents who closely monitor their teens' driving — and take away the keys when necessary — can make a difference. So can laws that allow

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police to pull over unbelted drivers and that limit the number of passengers in a young driver's car. Seat belt use declines as the number of riders rises, Shults says.

Meanwhile, at some high schools, students who are caught without belts cannot park in the school lot, says John Ulczycki of the National Safety Council. In Morristown, Ind., students wear bracelets with beads representing loved ones and are urged to look at their wrists each time they turn the ignition key, says Lonnie Smith, State Farm's community alliance manager.

In Gibson City, the kids keep working. In July, a group went to nearby Tazewell County — a community that lost 16 teens to car crashes in 15 months, Weber-Jones says — to share the safety message. And a few days ago, recent graduate Brandon Hoke, 18, left town for college. That's

remarkable because one day last fall, Hoke plowed his car into the back of a large truck at 45 mph. He was wearing a seat belt, he says, only because he had just seen a road sign, designed by his friends at school, that said: "Remember Greg and Steve. Slow Down. Buckle Up."

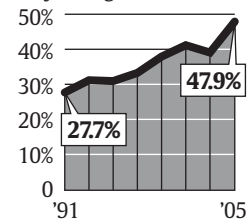
Greg and Steve Arends were twin brothers who were in a wreck a few years back; Greg died and Steve survived, at least partly because of his seat belt.

Hoke says: "I ended up with a big bruise and burns across my chest, but it was a lot better than going through the windshield."

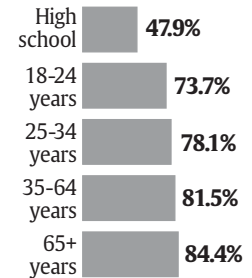
He went to school the next day and thanked his friends for saving his life.

### Students and seat belts

Percentage of high school students who report always using seat belts:



### Seat belt use by age group



Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Youth Risk Behavior Survey; CDC, 2005

By Marcy E. Mullins, USA TODAY

### Discussion:

Why are the public service ads aimed at teen drivers in Gibson City, Ill. effective? Why do you think so many teens are lax about using seat belts? Why is it especially important for teen drivers to buckle up? What theory may explain teens' risk-taking behavior? How can parents help their teenage children become safe drivers? What kind of laws can reduce the number of teens who die or are injured in traffic accidents? How are schools promoting safe driving?

### Activity:

In small groups, develop six questions for a survey of 20+ teen drivers at your school or in your community. Your questions should determine what safe and unsafe driving practices are common among teen drivers. For example, you could ask respondents how often they use their seat belts or talk on their cellphones while driving. After conducting your poll, record the results and analyze them. (Use the graphic organizer on the following page.) What do teen drivers do well? What do they need to work on? Next, decide what message (e.g., buckle up) you believe teen drivers need to hear most. Finally, create a print ad that you can publish in the school newspaper, post on the school website or enlarge to poster size and hang in your school's hallways. If possible, ask your local newspaper to judge your ads, and choose one or more to run in free ad space. As you develop your ad, consider the elements of an effective print ad, listed on the following page.

## Survey of teen drivers

Survey question	Results	Conclusions
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		

Message our ad will promote:

Ideas for making it effective: (Refer to info at right.)

**A.** (attention)

**I.** (interest)

**D.** (desire)

**A.** (action)

### Effective Ads

According to the Newspaper Association of America, the classic formula for effective ads is AIDA – Attention, Interest, Desire and Action.

In short, effective ads:

- ▶ capture readers' **attention** with compelling headlines and graphics.
- ▶ hold their **interest** with thought-provoking copy.
- ▶ explain what **desire** the product/service/message fulfills.
- ▶ ask readers to take a specific **action**.