

Opinion: Helping teens be safe on the roads

By Fran Clader

Traffic collisions are the No. 1 killer of teenagers in the United States, ending more young lives every day than cancer, homicide, and suicide combined. To bring awareness of the dangers facing young people when they drive, the California Highway Patrol will participate in National Teen Safe Driver Week, Oct. 18-24.

“Among all drivers, teenagers are at the greatest risk for a collision and are more prone to distraction than any other age demographic,” CHP Commissioner Joe Farrow said. “A national study from the American Automobile Association Foundation for Traffic Safety has shown that teenagers are distracted almost a quarter of the time they are behind the wheel.”

In 2013, the California Department of Motor Vehicles reported that California had 864,974 licensed drivers aged 15-19. The CHP’s Statewide Integrated Traffic Records System showed that more than 19,000 of them were involved in fatal or injury collisions. The teenage driver was at fault in 12,622, or 66 percent, of those collisions. This is a slight improvement from 2012, when more than 20,000 California drivers age 15-19 were involved in fatal or injury collisions, in which 13,424, or 67 percent, were at fault.

“Although national data shows a decline in the number of young drivers involved in vehicle crashes over recent years, they are still at greater risk than any other age group. The CHP will always be dedicated to promoting safe habits for California’s young drivers,” Farrow said.

The CHP has its own teen driver programs and works with the

California Office of Traffic Safety and Impact Teen Drivers to educate young drivers about the dangers and responsibilities behind the wheel.

Impact Teen Drivers is a non-profit program focused on saving teen lives through education.

“Parents are the strongest influence on their teens’ driving attitudes and behaviors. By the time they drive, your children have been watching, listening, and learning from everything you have been doing behind the wheel for the past 15.5 years. As a parent, when you model safe driving behaviors, you could save your child’s life,” Kelly Browning, executive director of Impact Teen Drivers, said.

Every 15 Minutes is a two-day CHP program focusing on high school juniors and seniors. It challenges them to think about drinking, driving, personal safety, the responsibility of making mature decisions, and the impact their decisions have on family, friends, and others.

Another CHP program is Start Smart, a two-hour class for teen drivers and their parents/guardians. Start Smart educates teenagers and parents about the responsibilities they face and teaches them how to stay safe on the road. Classes are free and usually hosted at a local CHP office.

The mission of the California Highway Patrol is to provide the highest level of safety, service, and security to the people of California.

Fran Clader works for the California Highway Patrol.