

Driving Distraction Test

Omaha, NE

Nearly 5,000 teenagers die in car crashes each year. Another 30,000 are injured. The main cause is driver error. And distractions are a growing part of the problem.

An obstacle course set up in the Westroads parking lot Friday by Allstate insurance, gave local teens a first-hand driving experience. It was designed to teach them how everything from drinking a soda to loud music can impact their reaction time.

Technology has taken distractions to a whole new level. According to a new Allstate study, 80% of teenage girls and 58% of teenage boys admit they've sent text messages from behind the wheel.

At the Action Against Distraction Teen Driving Challenge, 20 teens were asked to drive an obstacle course, with cones representing children. They had a short distance to reach 20 miles an hour, and all of them did fairly well avoiding collisions.

However, when teenagers like 16 year-old Tiffany Lirette were told to talk on the cell phone while driving, mistakes began to become apparent.

"It's a lot harder to keep your eye on the road, and look in front of you and stuff like that because you're concentrating on something else," said Lirette.

They faced other driving challenges as well. "Like drinking a Gatorade," said 15 year-old Cole Nolette, "texting and trying to steer one-handed, stuff like that."

Loud music and passengers were factors as well. Their situations many of the teens already anticipate but with obstacles they're not used to.

"Driving through the cones and they give you a speed limit, that, I don't know, you don't ever expect that to happen on the real road."

The course proved to be a challenge. It's not surprising to Allstate agent, Chuck McBride. "It's just awful to see the lives that are devastated by one split-second mistake."

Hoping to prevent that kind of tragedy, the McBrides put their own son through this course. "So they kind of have a better understanding of the control of the vehicle," said Mary McBride.

Fifteen year-old Patrick McBride said the course was an eye-opener. "I didn't think that multi-tasking while you're driving would be that difficult, but it really is."

Multi-tasking is something many parents know we're guilty off, as well. "I mean I realize I've probably been a horrible role model, you bet, so a good lesson for me, too," said Sara Nolette.

The lesson for Lirette, is to keep her eyes on the road and not on her phone. "I mean, I knew it was kind of distracting. But I thought, hey, I can do this. It's not a big deal. But this kind of showed me that it is."

While the students didn't get any driver's education credit for the class, their parents hope the lessons learned are much more valuable.