

Law strengthened for teen drivers

Saturday, July 11, 2009

By MARIBETH WARD, Staff Writer

The law recently passed by Indiana legislators should strengthen the guidelines for teen drivers. It became effective on July 1.

Graduated driver licensing is a three-stage process designed to ease new drivers into the experience.

It begins with a learner's permit requiring supervised driving at all times. Next is a probationary license that allows unsupervised driving with restrictions and concludes with a full-privilege license.

Indiana teens must comply with a number of restrictions once they are licensed. For the first 180 days of driving, they cannot drive from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m.

Beyond those first 180 days, no driving from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. from Sunday through Thursday and 1 a.m. to 5 a.m. on Saturday and Sunday mornings until they reach the age of 18.

There are exemptions for teens participating in school sanctioned and religious events or who are working or if they are accompanied by a licensed driver at least 25 years old.

New drivers cannot carry passengers for the first 180 days, or until the age of 18, unless accompanied by a licensed instructor or driver aged 25 year or older. Exemptions to this include siblings and/or the child or spouse of the driver.

Teens younger than 18 years old cannot operate a motor vehicle while using any type of telecommunications device unless making a 911 emergency call.

Beginning July 1, 2010, the minimum age for applying for a learner's permit will be 15 years and 6 months with a driver education course and 16 years without the course.

Before applying for a probationary license, all new drivers, regardless of age, will be required to complete a 50-hour driving log with 10 of those hours at nighttime.

The minimum age for a probationary license will be raised to 16 years and 6 months with driver's education and 16 years and 9 months without it.

AAA Hoosier Motor Club statistics show teen drivers have, by far, the highest crash rate of all drivers. The new law is aimed at reducing the number of teen-crash related injuries and fatalities.

Traffic crashes continue to be the number one killer of teenagers, taking approximately 6,000 lives of kids between the ages of 15 and 19 each year.

Another 500,000 are injured across the country in accidents.

In 2007, Indiana lost 153 teens in traffic accidents and more than 700 received sustained life-long, incapacitating injuries.

Driving logs can be obtained from AAA by contacting their Public Affairs office at 317-923-1500, ext. 380.