

EVERY 15 MINUTES

The Grim Reaper pays a visit to Cottage Grove High School to teach young people about the effects of driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs and texting while driving.

"Dear Mom and Dad, every fifteen minutes someone in the United States dies from an alcohol related traffic collision, and today I died. I never had the chance to tell you....."

'Emotionally charged' mock car crash gives students unique perspective

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The rushing sounds of sirens and horns from emergency vehicles could be heard from Cottage Grove High School — always an ominous thing to hear about. But last week's sirens left a positive impression on CGHS students, as they were part of a mock drunk driving accident in the school's back parking lot.

The mock accident is part of a program called "Every 15 Minutes," which was organized in coordination with the Lane County Sheriff's Office and aimed to show the devastation caused by drunk driving.

The program also implements a simulation of losing students. Leading up to the crash, someone dressed as the grim reaper would walk into any given classroom and pick a student to be essentially deceased. A police officer would then present an obituary written by that student's parents to the class that they were in.

"It's an attempt to give students a simulated experience of what it could be like," retired Sergeant Kevin Woodworth said. Woodworth acted as one of the leading coordinators of the entire event.

Before the crash, the whole student body assembled in the main gym to hear a few words from Woodworth and Principal Iton Udosenata.

"Outside you'll see exactly how emergency personnel respond to these situations," Woodworth explained. Woodworth also acknowledged the students who had been "chosen" by the grim reaper, who were dressed in black cloaks, represented the real amount of people that

died around the country in the time leading up to the mock crash.

When the students flooded out back to the parking lot, they saw what appeared to be two cars totaled after a head-on collision and several student-actors lying injured in each vehicle.

The program spares no expense. The cars were completely smashed with

windows shattered, glass littering the floor and blood sprayed over windshields and windows.

The scene seemed like a very well done movie set, which it technically was as these mock accidents are filmed and made into videos.

After starting off with a blood-curdling scream by the conscious driver, emergency vehicle came speeding in from a distance.

State and local police responded along with South Lane Fire and Rescue, and a helicopter was even flown in to airlift an injured passenger.

The driver, who was left with only a few cuts and bruises, failed a sobriety test and was subsequently arrested for a DUII. One student lay motionless as if dead and coroners arrived to carry the "dead body"

away.

This mock car crash is meant to instill a sense of fear in the student body and was described by South Lane Fire and Rescue as "an emotionally charged event designed to dramatically instill in teenagers the realization of the potentially dangerous consequences of drinking alcohol and texting while driving."



Alcohol and drugs impair driving ability in many ways

Millions of people die each year due to alcohol- and drug-related motor vehicle accidents. Many people simply do not realize how much alcohol and drugs affect one's ability to operate a motor vehicle. Many more may mistakenly feel they won't be among the many people who cause injuries to themselves or others when operating a vehicle in an impaired state. Drugs, whether they are illegal or legal, can impair a person's motor skills, leading to accidents. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says almost 30 people in the United States die each day in motor vehicle crashes that involve an alcohol-impaired driver. That equates to 1 death every 48 minutes. Many other accidents and fatalities can be traced back to other substances, whether legal or illegal. Using drugs such as marijuana and cocaine can be linked to roughly 20 percent of motor vehicle driver deaths in the United States. Compounding the problem is that these drugs are often used in conjunction with alcohol.

MADD estimates that a minimum of 1,074 fatalities in 2009 could be attributed to impairment-related driving in that country. Moreover, it is also estimated that 63,338 were injured in alcohol- and drug-related crashes the same year.

What is BAC?

BAC, or blood-alcohol concentration, measures the amount of milligrams of alcohol that is in 100 milliliters of blood. Each drink a person consumes increases his or her BAC.

The legal BAC varies all over the world. Some countries have a zero-tolerance policy, while in Canada and much of the United States the legal limit is .08 percent. That means anything more than 80 milligrams of alcohol is punishable. But a person can still suffer side effects of alcohol consumption if their BAC is below the legal limit. Between .03 and .06 a person may experience mild euphoria, trouble concentrating, a relaxed feeling, talkativeness and decreased inhibition. Between .06 and .08, feelings may be dulled, peripheral vision can decrease, and drivers may have poorer depth perception and struggle to recover from glare.

Drugs that impair driving

Using drugs can also make it hard to safely operate a motor vehicle. Many drugs can affect the body in ways that make it dangerous to drive.

A person may not think they are driving under the influence after taking a cold or allergy pill. However, many of these pills can impair driving ability because they tend to cause drowsiness.

Drugs that act on the brain, such as psy-

choactive drugs, antidepressants, sleeping medications, and anti-anxiety drugs, can impair reaction time, judgment and motor skills. Most medications that can prove dangerous while driving will carry a warning label that advises against driving or operating heavy machinery. Illegal drugs have their own share of negative effects. Research indicates that marijuana is one of the most prevalent illegal drugs detected in individuals fatally injured in driving accidents. The Emergency Medical Services Authority says marijuana can cause reduced concentration, difficulty perceiving time and distance, poor speed control, inability to read signs, drowsiness, and distraction.

Cocaine can mask fatigue and impair a person's ability to concentrate. Impulsive behaviors can lead to risk-taking. Some research suggests that antagonistic effects can be produced when cocaine is mixed with alcohol.

The EMSA says the use of amphetamines can interfere with concentration, impair vision and increase the driver's willingness to take risks.

It is better to err on the side of caution and avoid the use of any drugs or alcohol if you plan to be driving. No one wants to cope with the emotional, financial and legal ramifications that can occur should an accident leading to injury or fatality occur.

