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## Analysis sheds light on growing nighttime driving danger

(Full report and state-by-state illustrations are available at <http://t-driver.com/nighttime-fatal-crash-trends/>.)

A new nationwide analysis suggests that distractions — not alcohol — are contributing to a steady increase in nighttime fatal crashes for teenage drivers.

The trends are illustrated in a report produced by the Teens in the Driver Seat Center of the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI). The analysis that produced the report examined the effects of lighting conditions on crashes from 1999 to 2008 in all 50 U.S. states, along with the presence of alcohol as a factor in those crashes. The findings suggest something other than alcohol is pushing the nighttime fatal crash numbers up for teen drivers. The most likely reason, researchers say, is the use of cell phones.

Among the findings:

- The proportion of nighttime fatal crashes increased for all drivers, but went up slightly more for teenage drivers than for drivers age 20 and older.
- Alcohol use as a contributing factor increased for older drivers, but decreased slightly for teen drivers.
- The increase in nighttime fatal crashes contrasts with a decrease in overall crash fatalities nationwide during the same period.

Russell Henk, a senior research engineer for TTI, noted that nighttime driving is the most common, documented factor associated with crashes involving young drivers. Primary causes for nighttime crashes are a combination of the visibility challenges caused by dark conditions, slower response time brought about by fatigue, and lack of experience driving under such conditions. In addition, young drivers use cell phones behind the wheel (primarily for texting) at a rate much greater than non-teenage drivers.

"Being on a cell phone behind the wheel impairs our driving ability," Henk said. "When you add the nighttime danger, you create the perfect storm, and that storm is much more severe for young drivers, largely because of their lack of driving experience."

Despite its place at the top of the list for young drivers, the danger of nighttime driving is not well recognized. In surveys of nearly 20,000 Texas teenagers conducted by TTI, only 3 percent cited nighttime risk as a major contributor to crashes. Similar results have been noted in more limited survey samples in Georgia, California and Connecticut.

"Other dominant risk factors for teenage drivers (lack of experience, additional teenage passengers, speeding, not wearing seat belts, and alcohol) have been present and well recognized for many years, long before cellular communication became prevalent," the report notes. "However, it is cell phone use — propelled by rapid technological advancement and increased affordability — that is likely the most notable new driving risk factor for contemporary teens."

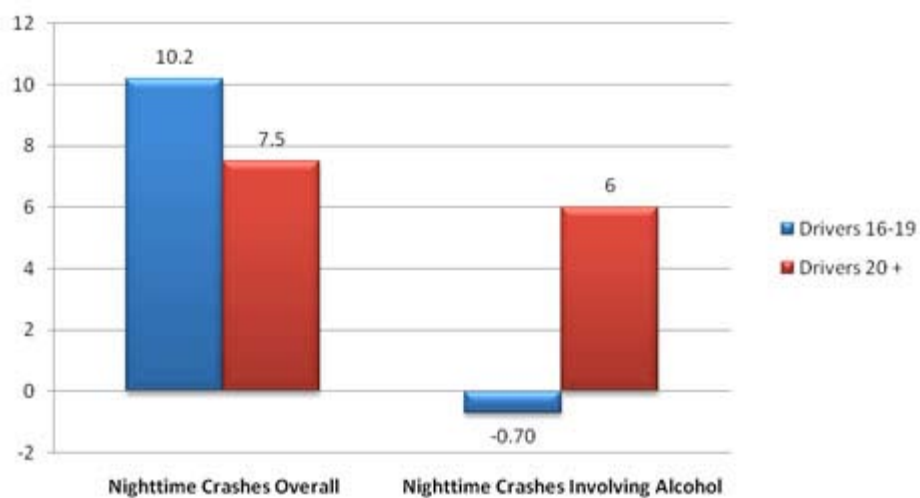
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### Percentage Change 1999-2008 Drivers (by Age) in US Nighttime Fatal Crashes



Source: Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS)

The State of Texas · Texas Homeland Security · State Expenditure Database · Statewide Search  
Risk, Fraud & Misconduct Hotline · Site Policies · Open Records Policy · Statutorily Required Reports · TTI Rules



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