

2nd Place Driver Safety Scholarship Essay: Nadia Harden

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Imagine two buses filled with screaming school children. Both buses are overturned and no one can escape because they are being pinned to the ground by each other, a pickup truck, and a tractor trailer. As the screams of the bleeding children saturate the air and increasingly get louder and louder, hope seems to become bleak. Three people are dead, 40 are severely injured, and the numbers are rising. Think of the young school children who have yet to fulfill their purpose in life. Think of the friends and families of the lost and injured. Now close your eyes and imagine this. What if you were one of the innocent individuals stuck in the accident? What if it was a close friend of yours? Imagine if it was your spouse, parent, or one of your children who died in the accident. How would your life be impacted? Now think about the fact

that this is a real event which took place on August 5, 2010 in Gray Summit, Montana. This is a real life example that clearly shows the danger of texting and driving.

There are general facts about texting and driving that students learn in driver's education classes. For example, looking down for five seconds while traveling 55 miles per hour is equivalent to blindly traveling the length of a football field (VA Tech Transportation Institute).

Driver's education classes teach that texting and driving is equivalent to driving after consuming four beers (National Highway Transportation Safety Administration). But people need to personally internalize the dangers of texting and driving and its horrific impact on the lives of everyday people. People need to know that 1,600,000 accidents per year are due to texting and driving (National Safety Council). They need to understand that 330,000 people are injured per year because of it (Harvard Center for Risk Analysis Study). People must realize that 11 teenagers die every single day because of texting and driving (Institute for Highway Safety and Fatality Facts). This is an issue that must be addressed soon and everyone must make a personal commitment to eliminating this problem.

But what must be done in order for more people to know, understand, and personally internalize that texting and driving is a serious issue and they must act now? There should be a push for more public advertising &

communication on this subject. Prevention posters and ads should be displayed in the places that people frequent the most. Posters should be displayed in schools and places of entertainment. The media can also be utilized to communicate the dangers of texting and driving. There should be more movies, plays, and songs written about texting and driving. These forms of entertainment can be directed towards the youth. Not only can they be informative and useful, but they can also be impactful and entertaining. Anti texting and driving talks should be utilized throughout school systems and work places. This should include several texting and driving victims with personal stories and testimonies. They could encourage people not to text and drive. They should share how this problem has personally impacted them and encourage others to make this issue more personal for them. These are effective ways to reach out and touch people while also keeping them informed.

Another way to positively impact the texting and driving movement is to create and enforce stronger laws. There are laws in place to limit texting and driving related accidents. There are 39 states that prohibit any driver of any age to text and drive. There are currently 32 states that prohibit young drivers from using cell phones while behind the wheel. Ten states prohibit all phone use while driving regardless of age. These laws are a great start, but clearly are not enough. Some states still have no restrictions against cell phone usage while driving. These states include South Carolina, Oklahoma, and

Florida. Tougher laws must be put in place to prevent texting and driving. The federal government should enact a law that prohibits texting while driving, regardless of age. Penalties for breaking this law should be stiffer than current penalties. The current punishment for texting and driving in Alabama is a \$25 fine for the first offense. The punishment needs to be much tougher. One can go to the movies and purchase refreshments and spend more than \$25. This is not a deterrent. Harsher penalties may be a drastic change, but considering the current reality, the benefits are worth it.

Not only should people be informed of the dangers of texting and driving, but they should also be aware of how technology can be used to prevent accidents. There are a number of cell phone apps that are being developed to address this issue. These applications, such as Live2Txt and DriveOFF, can be turned on manually as soon as the driver gets into the car and then turned off when the driver is at their destination. In addition, these apps can notify parents when they are turned off. Parents and loved ones need to know about these technology solutions. I am sure that the use of these apps will grow as loved ones learn about them. For example, my research for this essay led my parents to install a safe driving app on my cell phone. Another way to use technology to reduce texting related incidents is for people to use #X. #X is a campaign, started by AT&T, that has gone viral. When one is in the middle of a conversation and are about to drive, they should simply text others #X. Hashtag X is an efficient way for people to let others know that they are about

to drive and the conversation should be picked up later. Other companies and individuals should be encouraged to get involved and create other viral strategies. Technology clearly has a place in addressing this issue and the public must be better informed.

It may be true that young drivers make up a significant portion of texting and driving related accidents but they are not 100% of the problem. A blind eye should not be turned on adults who text and drive. Nearly 30% of adults over the age of 25 have either sent or received a text while driving (National Safety Council). Not only is it undeniably dangerous for adults to text and drive, but it also sets a horrific example for the upcoming youth. Almost 50% of young drivers have testified to seeing at least one of their parents use a cell phone while driving (National Highway Transportation Safety Administration). "Setting an example is not the main means of influencing others; it is the only means" (Albert Einstein). In order to prevent the youth from texting and driving, it starts with previous generations. Adults must make it clear by their actions that driving and texting is not acceptable.

In conclusion, texting and driving is a serious issue for our country. It puts many lives at risk on a daily basis. Not only are those who text and drive putting themselves in harm's way, but they are impacting the lives of the public and their loved ones. There are 1,600,000 accidents per year, 330,000 people injured per year, and 11 teenagers die every single day because of

texting and driving. While these numbers are startling, perhaps the most startling fact is that all of these causalities and fatalities are 100% avoidable.