




High schools bring the hammer down to keep upcoming proms safe

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Published Thursday, April 9, 2009
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DRIVERS INVOLVED IN CRASHES
Below are age groups that were involved in crashes in 2006. Licensed drivers between the ages of 15 and 20 were more than twice as likely to crash as drivers who were over 35.

Age Group	Percentage of Licensed Drivers Involved in Crashes
15-19	59.5
20-24	47.8
25-34	32
35-44	26.6
45-54	23.7
55-64	21.1
65-74	19.3
75 and over	22.1

YOUNG FATALITIES
Teens are involved in three times more fatal crashes than other drivers. Cell phones, not wearing safety belts and alcohol are usually contributing factors.

Category	Percentage
All other drivers	37
Minor	35
Major	12
Accidental	16

RURAL VS. URBAN
A study conducted by an insurance company using federal crash statistics found that crash rates doubled for rural teens.

Location	Percentage
Rural	51.5
Urban	25.4

Sources: South Carolina Chapter National Safety Council; NHTSA
The Island Packet

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For Hilton Head Island High School students, going to prom is not going to be as easy as finding a date and dressing to impress.

This year, principal Amanda O'Nan is requiring students to attend a four-hour class created by the National Safety Council called Alive at 25, which will be taught by the Beaufort County Sheriff's Office.

The program is designed to prevent vehicle crashes, the No. 1 killer of people between 16 and 24 years old, according to the safety council's Web site. It focuses on driving behaviors; how speeding, distractions and alcohol greatly increase the risk of death; and how taking control can reduce that risk.

O'Nan also is requiring parents to go to a one-hour abridged version of the program. Prom is May 2 at the Marriott in Palmetto Dunes.

Students can't attend the prom if they and their parents don't attend the class, O'Nan said.

She has required students to attend safety seminars before, but this one is more intensive, she said.

"At first, we were all taken aback because it was such a long class, but during school it's not too bad," said senior Elliot Van Dyke. "I know I don't mind because we get out of class for it."

O'Nan also has other prom rules this year.

Students are not allowed to bring dates 21 and older, a new requirement some of the students are complaining about, she said.

She'll also search every car, bus and limousine for drugs and alcohol when students arrive at the prom, she said. She will greet every student at the door, and adult chaperones and six sheriff's deputies will be on duty.

"It may seem excessive, but I feel like I've got to do this," O'Nan said. "I wouldn't be able to sleep at night if I wasn't paying real close attention."

Carole Korner, chairwoman of the school's Parent Teacher Student Organization, said the Alive at 25 program provides other benefits. Some insurance companies offer young drivers lower premiums for going through the program, she said.

Van Dyke said he took the class after he got a speeding ticket. It eliminated two points on his insurance policy, he said.

"I've learned a lot about the laws behind driving and driving safety," he said.

As far as O'Nan's prom requirements, he said her ideas are "pretty good."

"It raises awareness, especially about drinking and driving and things like that and the driving laws and how to handle different situations," he said.

BEAUFORT HIGH

Dan Durbin, principal of Beaufort High School, said the Alive at 25 program might be required for all freshman next year.

To encourage safe driving to and from the prom, Durbin said the South Carolina Highway Patrol will speak to students later this month about the dangers of drinking and driving and the importance of wearing a seat belt.

Durbin has another rule for prom.

If a student wants to bring a date who is not in high school, the date must apply in person at Beaufort High -- and sit down for an interview with Durbin so the principal can explain the school's rules. The prom is April 25 at the high school.

Durbin said he has interviewed about four or five dates each year for the past three years.

BATTERY CREEK HIGH

South Carolina Highway Patrol troopers speak to Battery Creek students each year about the consequences of drinking and driving. This year, officers also will speak to parents at an after-school Parent-Teacher-Student Organization meeting, principal Edmond Burnes said.

Students who are 21 or older are not allowed to attend the school's prom.

"That's been a policy forever," he said.

School resource officers and more than a dozen teachers chaperone the prom, which Burnes said has deterred students from misbehaving. This year's prom will be May 8 at the Holiday Inn in Beaufort.

"We've been fortunate," he said. "The students tend to behave quite well."

BLUFFTON HIGH

Bluffton High principal Bob Anderson said there are no requirements to attend prom. But every student is required to take the Alive at 25 class to park on campus during the school year.

The Bluffton prom is May 16 at Hampton Hall. Anderson said students will be able to park at the high school, and an activity bus will take them to the prom. He will also greet each student at the door, he said.






Last year, Bluffton High School junior Josh George was killed by an alleged drunken driver on his way home from dropping friends off after the prom.

Anderson said that phone call was the worst one he could ever receive as a high school principal. On May 1, a remembrance is planned for George and for all students the high school has lost.

Anderson wants all his students to be safe and make good decisions this prom season.

"Prom weekend is no excuse for students to take risks that they wouldn't normally take," he said. "Yes, we understand they will be out a little later than normal, but it's not the time for going to parties or making bad decisions. We want to see them the very next day because we really care about them."

Reporter Kate Cerve contributed to this report.

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