

# Edgefield County Sheriff's Office supports defensive driving class to reduce traffic fatalities among young people

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COUNTY – There's a grim statistic that Deputy Sonny Reel can't quite get out of his head. Nearly 30 young people in the United States between the ages of "15-24" die each day in motor vehicle crashes - the leading cause of death for that age group. In many cases, Reel knows, many of those 11,000 annual deaths could have been prevented. Reel has become certified for the Edgefield County Sheriff's Office to begin offering "Alive at 25," a national driving awareness program now in its third year in South Carolina.

He will present the first Alive at 25 class in the near future, hoping to cut into the number of deaths among young people through simple awareness. "The program stresses minimizing distractions, making good choices, and consequences - some are good and some are bad," said Steve Deibel, coordinator of the South Carolina Alive at 25 programs. "The uniqueness of our program is that it's taught by law enforcement. We stress what's happening when you are texting or using a cell phone while behind the wheel. We discuss speed, seat belts, and the effect of having all your friends in a vehicle. So we're looking at everything driver's ed. touches on, but we're looking at it very specifically in this four and a half hour program."

Reel attended an intensive 4 ½ day training course offered by the South Carolina National Safety Council to learn the program. Having interacted with students at Strom Thurmond High School, Reel said he hopes to find an immediate comfort level with the first class of young people enrolled in Alive at 25.

"I'll go in there in plain clothes, which helps the students calm down and be more comfortable with the instructor," Reel said. "I am law enforcement. Absolutely, but to them I want to be Sonny Reel, not Deputy Reel. The program includes risk identification, interactive video participation, experience sharing with peers, role-playing in various driving situations, and a review of local driving laws. A recent study by the South Carolina National Safety Council showed that 98 percent of program participants in the state said they would change their driving behavior after taking the class."

"The number of traffic fatalities in the "15-24" age range has decreased each year Alive at 25 has been offered in South Carolina. In 2009, 188 young drivers lost their lives in traffic collisions" Reel said. His goal for the program is a simple one tied to that trend.

"This program will be a success if we can reduce the number of deaths on our South Carolina roads," he said. "We're taking a program that is proven, putting it out to the public, and teaching it. I want to watch through the years as the number of deaths of our young people declines."

Because of his concern for teen traffic collisions and fatalities in Edgefield County, Reel is the second deputy Sheriff Dobey has sent to be certified to teach the Alive at 25 defensive driving programs. Lt. Mark Howard was certified approximately 2 years ago.

For more information on the Alive at 25 classes in Edgefield County, contact Reel at 637-4086 or [creel@edgefieldcountysheriff.org](mailto:creel@edgefieldcountysheriff.org), the National Safety Council at (803) 732-6778, or visit [www.scaliveat25.org](http://www.scaliveat25.org).