



THE VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT

“To Protect and Serve”

Office of the Commissioner

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Parents Urged to Combat Risky Teen Driving

Nationally, motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for teens (ages 15-18). According to the National Traffic Highway Safety Administration (NHTSA), in 2020, there were 2,276 people killed in crashes involving teen drivers, of which 748 deaths were the teen driver. To address this issue, the Virgin Islands Office of Highways Safety (VIOHS) is joining the nation from October 16-22, 2022, in promoting National Teen Driver Safety Week.

In the territory, data for teen drivers are equally critical. In FY 2021, there were 505 crashes involving teen drivers - 11.9% of the year's total crashes and a 28% increase from teen driver crashes recorded in FY 2020. In addition to inexperience and immaturity, other contributing factors to teen injuries and fatalities on the roadways include speeding, alcohol use, distracted and drowsy driving, transporting too many passengers, and no seat belt use. “Parents are major influencers on teens’ choices behind the wheel,” stated VI Police Department Commissioner Ray A. Martinez. “During this and every week, parents should have conversations with their teens to encourage and enforce safe driving behaviors.” By establishing clear expectations for safe driving practices with their teens, parents communicate consequences for noncompliance in advance that are significant to the teen driver and consistently enforced. “Parents have the power to impact teen driving practices and save lives,” offered Commissioner Martinez.

A safe driver is alert, provides full attention to the task of driving and exercises preventative strategies to keep vehicle occupants and other road users safe. “Teens must be encouraged to remain focused, drive sober, and wear seat belts on every ride to prevent injuries and fatalities caused by crashes,” urged VIOHS Director, Daphne O’Neal. Expectations set for teen drivers must extend to their passengers, who are often their peers. “For teens, driving is a privilege that parents must be willing to revoke to protect both ill-prepared teens and the community at large,” advised Director O’Neal.

Buckle up, VI! Every trip. Everyone. Every time. If You Feel Different, You Drive Different! For more safe driving practices and information on creating parent-teen driving agreements, contact the Virgin Islands Office of Highway Safety through Director O’Neal at daphne.oneal@vipd.vi.gov or Occupant Protection Planner/Coordinator Denise Gomes at denise.gomes@vipd.vi.gov. You may also contact the office via telephone at (340) 772-3025 or (340) 473-7383.

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