

# Cruise control

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Award Winning Entry

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After a long school day, senior Daniela Peguero was desperate to get home. But, while leaving the school parking lot in her sky blue Honda Civic, Peguero's plans changed drastically — she was involved in her first car accident.

"I knew I got hit after the first hit," Peguero said. "After the first hit I went to open the door. My hand was on the door when I was hit the second time."

Peguero said she was freaking out during this five-car pile-up.

"The third hit was the worst," Peguero said. "The passenger hit the dashboard."

Automobile accidents are the No. 1 cause of death among teens living in the U.S., driver's education instructor Craig Forgatsch said.

"A vehicle is a weapon. My own father was killed in a car accident," Mr. Forgatsch said. "Probably everyone in this school knows someone who died in a car accident."

The Bay offers driver's education classes that teach the affects that drugs and alcohol have on driving, as well as how to properly purchase a safe vehicle. The classes also educate students about automobile insurance, driving safety and driving rules.

"Everyone makes mistakes. The faster you go the less time you have to react," Mr. Forgatsch said. "The whole thing about driving is predicting what is going to happen to your vehicle and

the vehicles around you. The defensive driver will make sure those mistakes don't cause accidents."

There are many factors that contribute to an accident.

"Most accidents are caused by somebody's mistake. You take that mistake and combine it with speed and vehicle size and you get injuries," Mr. Forgatsch said.

The number of passengers in a car may also trigger an accident.

"The amount of seatbelts should be the number of passengers," said Deputy Charles Rawls, resource officer at the Bay whose job it is to deal with on-campus crashes. "Any more than that could be a driving hazard."

In conjunction with limiting the number of passengers present in the vehicle, Deputy Rawls said that it is imperative that drivers follow the driving laws, and that everyone in the car must wear a seatbelt.

"Never run a red light," Deputy Rawls said. "Those are the worst accidents."

Additionally, the time of day, the weather and the wearing of flip flops affect ones driving, he said.

Despite the fact that insurance costs for males are higher than for those of females, Mr. Forgatsch said that gender doesn't influence one's driving abilities; however, girls seem to be more careful than guys.

Peguero said that speeding was the main cause for the accident, which occurred while she was stopped at a stoplight.

"Teenagers today don't realize that you have to go the speed limit or a disaster like this could erupt," Peguero said. "To prevent an accident you need to be a defensive driver and be aware of those around you. [Drivers] definitely need to go the speed limit and be cautious."

Cellular phones, iPods, MP3 players and other technological devices are driving hazards as well; likewise, "anything that distracts you from driving is a danger," Mr. Forgatsch said.

Although accidents cannot always be avoided, there are different processes a student can follow to be a safer driver, such as Search Identify Predict Decide Execute (SPIDE) and the Smith System, which promotes driver awareness, Mr. Forgatsch said.

Drivers should "aim high, look ahead, keep your eyes moving, get the big picture, make sure others see you, and leave yourself a way out," Mr. Forgatsch said.

Equally as important is that drivers make sure their vehicle is operating properly.

"Make sure the car is in service: oil, brakes, lights are other contributing factors," Deputy Rawls said.

There are many steps to be taken after an accident occurs. Mr. Forgatsch said the first step is to become aware of the state of each person in the car. Those who are in a well enough state should "call and ambulance if an injury occurs and help out those people who are injured."

"If there is immediate danger, get away from the car or get the car off

of the road. Don't walk out into traffic," Mr. Forgatsch said. "Once the area is secure, call the police. Fifty percent of people just dash, take off because they don't have insurance."

In a hit-and-run case, if possible, the driver or a passenger should get the license plate number of the other vehicle, Mr. Forgatsch said.

Securing all necessary documents in one's car is one way to prepare for an accident.

"Once you are in one make sure you have all your documents: insurance card, driver's license and registration," Peguero said. "It made it a lot easier for me."

Communication is important when involved in an accident. Peguero said she was hysterical and that "it was really hard to calm down."

"Speak calmly to the cop and explain everything clearly," Peguero said. "Call a parent and let him or her know what happened. When you get home call your insurance company and let them know everything that happened."

Approximately 5,000 teens die every year due to vehicular accidents. Yet, these accidents can act as a wake-up call for teens.

"The first accident you get into is most likely the one that kills you," Mr. Forgatsch said. "Once you get in an accident, you are more careful."

Peguero said that after the accident she realized that everyone should "enjoy life and be happy."

"Just be aware because you never know what's going to happen," Peguero said.

**Teen Driving**

has become a serious problem in the US in recent years. In the U.S., 5,000 teens die every year in car crashes. That's an average of 14 a day.

and read these statistics before you get back in the car.

**STOP**

**SPEED LIMIT** ∞

Nearly 40% of all fatal teen crashes are caused by speeding.

vs.

Twice as many teen boys die in car wrecks than girls.

Two-thirds of teens who die in car crashes are not wearing a seat belt.

source: <http://www.keepthedrive.com>

GRAPHIC BY JOSH LEWIN