



# CATAWBA COUNTY

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## **TEENS INVITED TO ENTER DISTRACTED DRIVING VIDEO CONTEST**

In an era of instant communication, it is common to see people talking on cell phones or texting while in stores, on the street or in cars. Though it is illegal in North Carolina to text while driving, many people do it every day.

Members of the Child Fatality Prevention Team, Community Protection Team and Catawba County Youth Council are taking steps to raise awareness of the dangers of texting while driving in hopes of reducing the number of incidents in Catawba County.

All area high school and home school students are invited to participate in the new Distracted Driver Video Contest, which challenges teens to create the best depiction of common distractions that interfere with the safe operation of a motor vehicle.

Individual students, a team of as many as five students, or a school/community club may enter the contest. The videos must be the original work of the students entering the contest. Students are encouraged to address more than one thing that may distract a driver, including talking on a cell phone, texting, eating, listening to loud music or driving with too many passengers.

Videos will be judged by the Distracted Driving Committee, which will name a Grand Prize winner. A Viewer's Choice winner will also be selected. The Grand Prize will be a limousine ride to a local restaurant and lunch at the restaurant. The Viewer's Choice winner will receive a certificate.

More information, including an application form, is available on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Distracted-Driving-Video-Contest>.

According to the 2010 Catawba County State of the County Health Report, injuries sustained from motor vehicle accidents were the second leading cause of death in persons age 0-39.

Distracted driving, including the use of a cell phone, is a factor in nearly 80 percent of accidents, according to a study published by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute.

A September 2010 report by the U.S. Transportation Department said 5,474 people died in 4,898 crashes linked to distracted driving last year, which is down slightly from 5,838 deaths in 5,307 crashes in 2008. Of those in 2009, about 1,000 involved cell phones. Distracted drivers were a factor in 16 percent of crashes and deaths in both years.

“Drivers already have a lot on their mind when they get behind the wheel,” explained Jennifer McCracken, health services manager at Catawba County Public Health and co-chair of the Community Child Protection Team/Fatality Task Force.

“The use of a cell phone is an unnecessary added distraction. We hope that teens will either turn off the phone while driving or refrain from using it while driving. A text or call is not worth their life.”

John Eller, Catawba County Social Services director who is also co-chair of the Community Child Protection Team/Fatality Task Force, added: “We are seeing fatalities of teenagers in which distracted driving was a factor and we are trying to do our part to raise awareness of the issue. We would love to see a decrease in the number of teen fatalities related to distracted driving.”

Students participating in the video competition must follow contest guidelines, which include the following:

- Students must avoid demonstrating distracted driving actions in a moving vehicle.
- No part of the video should be recorded in a moving vehicle.
- Videos must be 90 seconds or shorter.
- Windows Movie Maker or iMovie may be used to edit the videos.
- All entries must be accompanied by liability and photo release forms.

After submission, all videos become the property of Catawba County government. All entries are due to the school contact person by May 2. The contact persons and their schools are as follows: Hickory High School, David Coyne, principal; Hickory Career and Arts Magnet High School, Kelly Owen, principal; Newton Conover High School, Amy Beane, drama and film teacher; Health-Science School, John Robinson, principal; Bandys High School, Susan Rudisill, guidance counselor; Bunker Hill High School, Sarah McBride, guidance counselor; Challenger High School, Anita Denny, guidance counselor; Fred T. Foard High, Cheryl Lattimore, guidance counselor; Maiden High, Nicole Sykes, guidance counselor; St. Stephens High, RaeAnne Kumer, guidance counselor. Other schools and home schools may submit their video projects directly to Donna Mull, N.C. Cooperative Extension Service, P.O. Box 389, Newton, N.C. 28658.

Information about the contest is also available from Donna Mull, Catawba County Youth Council advisor, at 828-465-8240 or donna\_mull@ncsu.edu; John Eller, Catawba County Social Services, at 828-695-5600 or jeller@catawbacountync.gov; or Jennifer McCracken, Catawba County Public Health, at 828-695-5800 or jmccrack@catawbacountync.gov.