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## Utah's teen drivers are safer than most

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The rate of deaths among young drivers in Utah is among the lowest in the country, according to a survey released Thursday by a physician-led traffic safety advocacy group and the National Safety Council.

Utah ranked 46th (No. 1 being the worst) in the country, based on the number of young drivers involved in fatal car crashes per 100,000 16- to 20-year-old drivers.

The survey - based on 2003 data from the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration's fatality analysis reporting system - shows for every 100,000 young drivers in Utah, 44.5 were killed in car crashes.

The lowest-ranked state, New Hampshire, had 35.8 fatalities per 100,000 teenagers; the nation's capital was the highest-ranked, at 127 fatalities per 100,000.

John Pastuovic, spokesman for the National Safety Council, said there were no discernible patterns among the states that ranked the best or the worst.

Like Utah, many states have implemented graduated driver-licensing laws, which include restrictions on nighttime driving and underage passengers before teens can earn a full license.

However, many of those same states have high rates of deaths among young drivers, Pastuovic said. In contrast, some states with no graduated driver-licensing laws had among the lowest rates of death.

A recent study by the Intermountain Injury Control Research Center at the University of Utah School of Medicine showed there was a 5 percent reduction in the rate of crashes among 16-year-old drivers in Utah after the stricter licensing laws were implemented beginning in 1999. That equates to about nine fewer crashes per 1,000 licensed 16-year-old drivers per year.

While there was a decrease in crashes, however, it was substantially less in Utah than in other states: Michigan, North Carolina, Connecticut, California and Ohio.

Mark Panos, deputy director of the Utah Highway Safety Office, said Utah's lower fatality rate could be, in part, a result of education programs, such as "Click it or ticket," implemented years ago.

"Maybe they [young drivers] are starting to get into those safe habits," he said. "Maybe they are more aware of some of the fatality-causing issues."

The survey, jointly released by the National Safety Council and the physician-led group End Needless Death on our Roadways (END), was accompanied by *Prescription for Teen Driver Safety*, a report on youth driving fatalities and recommendations for making roadways safer.

The report includes sample teen driving restrictions, state fatality data and ranking information, and a youth driving fact sheet.

To help parents minimize a teen's risk, END's prescription for teen driver safety includes:

- l A minimum of 30-50 practice hours.
- l A learners permit for at least six months.
- l No driving between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m.
- l Restrictions on the number of passengers.

l And zero tolerance for drinking and driving.

"Parents need to be involved in this process and need to step up and be involved in teens' early driving experience," Pastuovic said.

Nationwide, young drivers make up 6 percent of the driving population, yet are involved in nearly 20 percent of all fatal motor vehicle crashes - about one in five.

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A safety tool kit

To download a copy of the *Prescription for Teen Driver Safety* tool kit or for more information, visit END's Web site at <http://www.EndNeedlessDeath.org>.