



**COUNTY OF RIVESIDE  
COMMUNITY HEALTH AGENCY  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**TEENS AT SUMMIT DEVISE ADS TO TEACH PEERS  
AUTO SAFETY**

RIVERSIDE, Calif., Feb. 20, 2007 – “Seat belts save lives.”

The slogan and its message never really sank in while Jennifer Sietel was growing up. But at age 16, the Temecula resident became a quadriplegic when she was ejected from her family’s car in a rollover accident.

Now 25, Sietel works as a volunteer for Think First, a group that educates teenagers and young adults about the importance of wearing seatbelts.

“I talk about what it’s like to be paralyzed,” said Sietel, who was riding in her parents’ car when it rolled over. Sietel said she talks with teens and young adults about the potential consequences of not wearing seat belts.

In 2003, nearly one in five Riverside County high school students reported that they rarely, if ever, wear seat belts when riding with someone else, even though traffic accidents are the leading cause of death for teenagers and young adults between the ages of 16 to 24. Seat belt use is even lower among teens involved in alcohol-related accidents.

Young drivers also account for an unusually high percentage of alcohol-related traffic accidents, which may suggest that well-known public service announcements like “Don’t drink and drive” or “Friends don’t let friends drive drunk” aren’t working, either.

According to Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), people aged 16 to 24 were recently involved in 28 % of all alcohol-related driving accidents, although they account for only 14% of the U.S. population.

“These statistics should alarm everyone,” said Michael Osur, deputy director of Riverside County’s Department of Public Health.

Hoping to resonate with local teens, Riverside County’s Department of Public Health is turning to local high school students to develop a public service advertising campaign of their own. “Kids know how kids think and act. We must listen to our local youth on the best way to get the safety message to them,” said Osur.

Creative ideas for the campaign will be developed at the County's Youth Traffic Safety Summit, which will take place from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 24 at California Baptist University's Yeager Center in Riverside.

The daylong summit will include presentations by Sietel as well as Anthony Acosta, a Moreno Valley resident and MADD vice president, who will talk about the dangers of drinking and driving. A 23-year-old drunken driver killed Acosta's 16-year-old son, Christopher, while he was riding his bicycle.

Local radio and television personalities will also attend the summit and will show students how to develop sound bites and other creative concepts that form the basis of an effective advertising campaign. The students will then work together in groups to develop their own public service announcements. A panel of judges will select the best announcements, which will be produced later with funding from local businesses.

Funding for the Youth Traffic Safety Summit is made possible by a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

For more information regarding the Youth Traffic Safety Summit as well as statistics involving driver safety, please contact Rebecca Hansen at the Riverside County Department of Public Health's Injury Prevention Services office at (951) 358-7177.

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