

Reporter Tries Mobile Texting and Drunken Driving Simulator at Centralia College Event

Education: Simulator Teaches Potential Dangers of Drunken Driving, Texting While Driving

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As I stepped into the car, I felt sober.

But once I began driving, it was apparent by my slowed reaction times, my swerving and my incredibly low speed that I was far from OK.

Approximately 50 students at Centralia College experienced the same thing as the Unite Corp.'s Arrive Alive Tour aimed to educate people on the dangers of drunken driving and texting while driving.

The tour provides an environment where people can experience dangerous driving habits in a place where they are not risking their lives.

"What's crazy is when you are drunk, your reaction time feels normal for you. You don't feel any different, but being sober and we're simulating the reaction time, you can tell how delayed that reaction is," Tyler Herbstreith, a team leader of the Arrive Alive Tour, said.

Most drinking and driving accidents happen when the driver's blood alcohol concentration is between 0.06 and 0.10. Many times, people often feel only "buzzed," when in reality their brain function becomes impaired, causing slower than normal response time.

Texting and driving also poses great risks, and Herbstreith said drivers are six times more likely to get in a crash texting and driving than drinking and driving.

The simulator requires participants to wear virtual glasses and the driver essentially participates in a driving video game. Sensors on the gas and brake pedals, as well as the steering wheel, are used to delay reaction time and affect hand-eye coordination during the drinking and driving portion. The car responds as if the individual driving is intoxicated.

During the texting and driving simulator, students also wore virtual glasses, but the car's controls remained normal.

"It's just a straight sober drive and you can pull your cellphone out and try to compose a text message while driving through a virtual world," Herbstreith said. "Surprisingly you see a lot of the same mistakes from the two drivers."

The tour focuses its efforts on high school and college campuses throughout the nation, educating students on the risks of impaired and distracted driving.

"It's an awareness program showing people the dangers of distracted driving by letting them try it themselves in a safe environment," the team leader said.

The company, based out of Grand Rapids, Michigan, hosts three to four shows a week, starting in mid-February and stretching until the end of May. During the fall semester, tours begin in late August and typically end around Thanksgiving.

"For a lot of people the best way for them to learn is a hands- on, first-person experience," Herbstreith said. "This just gives them a safe environment to try it and see what could happen if they were to drink and drive or text and drive in the real world instead of a virtual world."

Quin May, a team leader for one year, said most people do not make it more than a minute in the simulations. For me, my experience ended with a collision approximately 30 seconds into the drive, and I was later cited with a "DUI" for a BAC of 0.13.