



August 17, 2010

# Simulator teaches perils of distracted driving

By Jill Harmacinski  
STAFF WRITER

NORTH ANDOVER — The driver in front of him slammed on his brakes unexpectedly, but Colin Kenny was too busy returning a text message to notice the bright red glow of brake lights.

The 17-year-old slammed into the back of the car. Then, the following message flashed before him on the big screen, "You can't stop for things you don't see ... You text, you lose."

It's the mantra of Distractology 101, a course that simulates the real-life dangers posed by texting and chatting on a cell phone while behind the wheel.

Some 80 Merrimack Valley teens took the course last week when Distractology's 36-foot neon yellow mobile classroom rolled into town.

The mobile classroom was developed by Arbella Insurance Group's Charitable Foundation. Using research conducted by Dr. Donald Fisher, an engineering professor at UMass Amherst, Arbella developed the simulated driving console for teens and other inexperienced drivers.

Through his research, Fisher concluded that "real life scenarios" are the best way to teach safe driving techniques.

Roughly 6,000 people are killed each year due to multi-tasking behind the wheel. And studies have shown that driving while distracted is equivalent to having a blood alcohol level of .08, according to Arbella.

Arbella's goal is to train 10,000 new drivers



Colin Kenny finds it hard to keep his eyes on the road as he tries to read a text message while in a simulated driving situation. Jan Seeger



Colin Kenny, of Danville, N.H., watches a three-screen simulated-driving scenario in a series of exercises designed to teach the hazards of distracted driving during Distractology 101, a hands-on class designed to teach teens how to avoid the dangers of distracted driving. Jan Seeger

*Comments from unregistered accounts will post at once. Comments from unregistered accounts will post after being reviewed by a site moderator. Posts that do not meet site standards, which can be found [here](#), will be removed.*

## Add New Comment

Post as ...

## Showing 0 comments

Sort by Oldest first

[Subscribe by email](#)

[Subscribe by RSS](#)

over the next three years. Arbella's Charitable Foundation is spending \$1.4 million over the next three years to bring the mobile classrooms to cities and towns in Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

Trackback URL

Distractology 101 doesn't replace traditional driver education. But students who enroll and pass the course are eligible for a 7 percent insurance discount. They also receive a \$15 Mobil/Exxon gas card for taking the class.

[comments powered by DISQUS](#)

"If we can save one life it's well worth is," said Gary J. Milliken, chief executive officer of Harrington Insurance Agency.

Once behind the wheel of the simulator, teens are put through six different driving scenarios. They are asked to read text messages and send text messages while driving.

Meanwhile, there are stop signs, traffic lights, pedestrians and other hazards to be on the lookout for throughout the 45-minute course.

Whether driving through busy city intersections or out on a country highway, the course stresses the importance of constant attention on the road. While focusing on driving, it's impossible for the brain to focus on anything else.

"A brain simply cannot do two things at the same time," a section of the simulated course emphasizes.

Finally, students take an "improvement drive" and hopefully show off their new skills.

Working last week with Kenny, instructor Dan Hicks noted many teens have a "it won't happen to me" attitude.

"You might get away with it a million times but it's that one time you don't get away with it," Hicks said.

Finally, the teens are asked to complete an online portion of the course.

The mobile classroom is off to Braintree this week. For more information on Distractology 101, check out DistractU.com. Milliken also encouraged parents to take advantage of the online training.

**If You Haven't Had An Accident In 3 Years, You Are Paying Too Much For Auto Insurance** **Click Your Age:**

25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49
50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74

© 2010 LowerMyBills.com

SalemNews.com, Salem, MA 32 Dunham Road Beverly, MA 01915