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**Teen Roadway Safety Assessments:  
Building Youth Awareness of Roadway Safety Issues**

By: James Scott Baron

Across the country, countless teenage students walk or drive to school every day. What many of these students may not realize are the countless hazards surrounding them as they travel.

Dangers like cars and trucks backing out of driveways, sidewalks blocked by overgrown shrubs, missing signs, vehicles making improper and illegal turns, and drivers talking on their cell phones or even texting.

A new program is currently being piloted around the country to help teens identify these kinds of dangers, but also to better understand what they can do to help reduce these risks and improve safety for their community. The program, Teen Roadway Safety Assessments (TeenRSA™), is a joint initiative between the American Traffic Safety Services Foundation, the National Organizations for Youth Safety (NOYS) and the Roadway Safety Foundation (RSF).

With the support of local transportation professionals, teens work together to identify potential problem areas in their communities, learn the fundamentals of roadway design and safety, and then apply what they have learned in the field. After receiving a safety briefing from a roadway professional, they don reflective vests and head out into the surrounding community to investigate and study these issues. To help them every step of the way, a guide and field handbook have been developed as part of the national program. Once in the field, the teens discover and learn first-hand about the many dangers that exist in and around the roadway and discover what can be done to improve their surroundings, including better signage, roadway striping, or even simply cutting back bushes to improve visibility. They also often learn that they also need to change their own awareness, both as pedestrians and young drivers.

“The real objective of the program is to get teens to see the road, other drivers and other road users with a fresh set of eyes and with a new perspective on their surroundings,” said retired Federal Highway official Joe Toole, who is serving as the program manager for the pilot programs. Building on successful projects completed in Tampa and Orlando, Fla., interest for the program is growing nationally and even internationally.

“The program is not only educational, it empowers students to make choices and to become advocates for safety improvements by providing each of them a unique leadership opportunity outside the classroom,” said ATSSA’s President and CEO Roger Wentz.

Additionally, the program provides students a means to solicit input and build relationships with roadway safety professionals, make a positive difference in their community, and spark an interest in a possible career in the transportation industry.

“All of the students, school leadership, and transportation professionals that have taken part in these assessments have found them to be a very positive learning experience,” Toole said. “The program not only empowers the teens to become champions for safety, but it also helps their communities see the improvements that can be made when they work together.”

The program will officially “roll out” nationally in the spring of 2013, following several more pilot projects. The national program is seeking interested partners and sponsors. To learn more, please contact Joe Toole at (703) 231-4785.

*(Baron is the Director of Communications for the American Traffic Safety Services Association, headquartered in Fredericksburg, Va.)*

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