

**PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE**  
**Testimony Before the**  
**House Transportation Committee**  
**July 24, 2007**



**Presented by**  
**Lieutenant Frank D. McCorkle**  
**Pennsylvania State Police**  
**Troop K, Philadelphia**

Good Morning. I am Lieutenant Frank D. McCorkle of the Pennsylvania State Police. I am the Patrol Section Commander for Troop K, Philadelphia. On behalf of Colonel Jeffrey B. Miller, the Commissioner of the Pennsylvania State Police and Captain David F. Young, the Commanding Officer of Troop K, I would like to thank you for the invitation to provide testimony at this public hearing concerning juvenile drivers and distracted drivers.

Highway safety continues to be a major objective of the Pennsylvania State Police. In our efforts to achieve this purpose, Troopers enforce the traffic laws of the Commonwealth as part of their patrol duties. Troopers also investigate vehicle crashes to identify causal factors and then take appropriate enforcement action to help prevent future crashes.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), driver inattention is the leading factor in most crashes and near crashes. Primary causes of inattention are distracting activities such as cell phone use and drowsiness. However, additional distractions identified by NHTSA are: reaching for a moving object in the vehicle, reading, and applying make-up.

As the Pennsylvania Driver's manual states: 'Driving requires constant awareness of everything around you such as speed, signs, and road conditions.' Many drivers at some point look away from the road - whether it is to dial a cell phone, when talking on the phone, to read, apply make-up, eat fast food, drink a cup of coffee, check their PDA,

or even only to change the radio station or replace a CD. However, the more frequently a driver engages in such multi-tasking activities, the greater the chance that they will be involved in a vehicle crash. No one can be sure when it is safe to look away. The situation on a highway can change in an instant, leaving a driver with little time to react. Such examples of distracted driving are even more of a problem, when the driver is committing another moving violation, such as speeding or following another vehicle too closely.

The Pennsylvania State Police investigated three-hundred-eighty four traffic deaths during the first six months of 2007. Thirteen of these deaths involved a distracted operator. Most of the distracted operator crashes involved rear-ending another vehicle or striking a fixed object.

While the ability to multi-task may be a desirable attribute in the office or at home, all available research indicates that drivers should do their best to focus solely on driving and potential hazards when they are behind the wheel. Engaging in any other activity while driving, increases the chances that the driver will be involved in a vehicle crash. The State Police have and will continue to take appropriate enforcement action against those drivers who commit traffic violations, in an effort to minimize the number of vehicle crashes and the resulting injuries and fatalities.

While distracted drivers represent a significant traffic hazard, young drivers are another area of concern. Drivers age fifteen to twenty are twice as likely to be in a fatal crash as adult drivers. Sixteen-year-old drivers have crash rates five times greater than eighteen-year-old drivers. The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) cites factors including lack of driving experience and inadequate driving skills; excessive driving during nighttime, higher-risk hours; risk-taking behavior; poor driving judgment and decision making; drinking and driving; and distractions from teenage passengers. Young males are also more likely not to use seat belts; this is particularly risky since NHTSA reports that in 2004, 74% of passenger vehicle occupants killed were partially or totally ejected from the vehicle in which they were traveling.

NHTSA reports that Motor Vehicle Crashes were the leading cause of death for fifteen to twenty-year olds. Fifteen to twenty-year-olds account for 6.3% of U.S. drivers, but account for 16 % of all U.S. crashes and 12.6 % of all fatal U.S. crashes. During the first six months of 2007, fifteen to twenty year olds accounted for 22% of all fatality victims in crashes investigated by the Pennsylvania State Police.

Distracted drivers and young drivers are each identified as at-risk for traffic crashes, but the combination of the two can have deadly effects. NHTSA reports that sixteen-year-old drivers are more likely to be involved in a fatal crash when other teenagers are in the car and that the risk increases with every additional passenger. In 2003, six of every ten teen passenger deaths occurred with a teen driver at the wheel.

In recent weeks, the headlines have reported a New York State crash in which five teens were killed when their vehicle slammed head-on into a truck. There is reason to believe that the seventeen-year-old driver may have been text messaging. Closer to home, in May of 2007, two Bucks County teenagers were leaving their high school when they were involved in a collision in which a teenage pedestrian was killed. In April 2006, three Chester County teenagers were searching for a residence on a country road, when the seventeen-year-old operator lost control causing the vehicle to rollover killing one of the passengers and seriously injuring the other. Troopers in Lebanon County have twice this year investigated crashes where multiple teenagers were traveling in the same vehicle and a crash resulting in death occurred.

Highway risks due to juvenile and/or inattentive drivers are very real.

Again, on behalf of the Pennsylvania State Police I thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee today. I would be happy to answer any questions.

**Kurt J. Myers**  
**Deputy Secretary for Safety Administration**  
**Pennsylvania Department of Transportation**

Kurt J. Myers was appointed Deputy Secretary for Safety Administration for the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) in June 2007. In this position, Myers oversees nearly 1,200 driver and vehicle services employees who provide quality customer services while keeping the safety and security of the commonwealth's 8.5 million licensed drivers and 11.1 million registered vehicle owners a paramount focus.

As Deputy Secretary for Safety Administration, Myers oversees key highway safety improvements relating to driver behavior, a customer-conscious business approach, implementation of motorist-related legislation, and integration of new initiatives that improve customer services, streamline processes and upgrade quality through the use of new technologies. Myers is also responsible for the regulatory oversight of approximately 5,000 new and used car dealers, 2,500 agents, 17,000 vehicle safety inspection stations and over 7,000 emissions inspections stations.

Prior to being named deputy secretary, Myers served as director of PennDOT's Bureau of Motor Vehicles, where he was responsible for the titling and registration of vehicles and overseeing approximately 5,000 new and used car dealers, 2,500 issuing agent, 17,000 vehicle safety inspection stations and over 7,000 emissions inspections stations. Before joining PennDOT in 1998, Myers served as chairman of the board for Amalgamated Automotive Industries, Inc.

Myers is a central Pennsylvania native and received a bachelor of arts degree from Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio in 1978.