



Fogle insurance, WAIT TO TEXT: 9/30/11

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Lake Norman Citizen*

Quick. What page is this? Is the line at the top missing something? Is it spelled correctly?

BAM!

As a text-messaging driver, that's all it takes. A few seconds of seemingly innocent distraction. A lingering glance away from the road at a few simple letters. A momentary misstep with everlasting consequences.

Fogle Insurance Group of Huntersville wants high school students to learn this lesson the easy way. The family owned and operated company, in partnership with Auto Owners Insurance and in cooperation with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, is taking the "Wait to Text" fight directly to local driver's education students.

With CMS's permission, Fogle Insurance representatives have already introduced students at Hopewell, Hough and Mallard Creek to the "W82TXT" campaign. North Mecklenburg High School is next on the list.

Michele Fogle-Sizemore, the insurance company's director of group benefits/marketing, has been the featured presenter, but all the Fogles at the family-run firm, including President George D. Fogle and vice presidents Shawn Fogle Principi and Doug Fogle, have united in the team effort to help future drivers understand the perils and forego the pitfalls of texting while driving.

"The goal is to catch the young drivers before they develop the habit," Fogle-Sizemore says. "The kids seem to be taking an interest and I think the message is getting through."

Enhanced by a video produced by AT&T and with a basic script of facts concerning the hazards of texting while driving, the presentations are staged in driver's education classrooms and are, by design, brief and straightforward.

"I usually go through the script and we watch the video," Fogle-Sizemore says, "and then I let them take over the discussion."



The facts provide a sharp focus to the conversation. Research conducted by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute indicates texting while driving increases the risk of an accident more than 23 times over normal driving and texting while driving results in longer response times than even drunk driving. And students are informed that a car traveling at normal highway speed would cover a distance longer than a football field in just the few seconds it takes to glance at a message or double-check a key stroke.

And while the presentation hammers home the facts, the video ties in faces and families tragically impacted by just a few seconds – a few, simple tapped-out letters – texting behind the wheel.

Separate stories of auto accident deaths and injuries, directly linked to texting young drivers, are delivered by anguished parents struggling with memories of loved ones lost and remorseful young adults haunted by the damage caused and lives altered by a few seconds of distraction.

The overall message from the video and presentation is that texting can wait, and teenagers with lives that seem to revolve around texting are reminded that it's better to lose one minute of your life than to lose your life in one minute.

Fogle-Sizemore says she regularly asks the students if they know people who text and drive, and she says the standard response is a little unsettling.

“A lot of the kids raise their hands,” she says, “and usually the people they know who text while driving are their parents.”

She points out that statistics indicate that while 95 percent of drivers surveyed understand that texting behind the wheel is unacceptable and unsafe, at least 21 percent admit to doing it anyway.

The “W82TXT” campaign wants the next crop of new drivers to start reversing that trend. In addition to logo-bearing bumper stickers and rubber thumb bands designed to remind tempted texters of the dangers involved, students attending “Wait to Text” programs are also given the opportunity to enter a video contest that could result in their public service announcement being part of a future Auto-Owners Insurance campaign.

Fogle-Sizemore says she expects the company to continue “W82TXT” presentations throughout the school year, possibly as often as once a month at high schools as new driver’s education classes begin. She would also like to reach others with the program.

“We’d like to get involved with private and charter schools,” she says, “as well as church groups and civic clubs. And it would really be a nice program for school PTA’s and PTO’s too.”



She says the insurance company, with long-time community ties and an office full of CMS graduates, wants to reach students and others with the simple message that, at any age, “W82TXT” is a good motto to live by.

For additional information, contact Fogle Insurance Group at 704-875-3060 or at [www.foglegroup.com](http://www.foglegroup.com) .