

## **Helping Teens and Parents Find What They Need on DMV Web Sites**

By AAA Government Relations and Traffic Safety Advocacy

One of the first places many parents and teens look for information about learning to drive is their state DMV. Government Web sites can be vital resources for families as their youngsters gradually develop into responsible adult drivers.

Yet AAA analysis of 51 DMV Web sites (50 states and the District of Columbia) in June 2006 found mixed results for people looking for comprehensive information on teen drivers. The information can be hard to find:

- 15 states have links on their DMV home pages that make it easy for visitors to find the information;
- On 30 other sites the information could be found with a reasonable amount of effort; and
- The remaining six DMV sites were difficult to navigate when looking for teen driving content.

Many DMV sites lacked well-organized sections with teen driver content. Instead of collecting a range of useful information and resources for teens and their parents on one page of the Web site, their content was either scattered across the site or non-existent.

- 14 states had a page on the DMV Web site that contained most of the basic information needed to guide a teen driver;
- 23 other sites had some key content for teen drivers and their families, but lacked some basic information or tools; and
- 14 states had little or no information in a central place on their site.

The survey revealed some significant gaps in state content for specific information about teen drivers, components of graduated driver licensing, and tools to assist parents in developing their young drivers. Specifically:

- About one-quarter (12 out of 51) failed to mention information about risks for teen drivers such as that car crashes are the leading killer of teens;
- Almost one-fifth (9 out of 51) don't describe their state's graduated driver licensing process;
- Very few (8 out of 51) include a parent-teen driving agreement;
- About one-quarter (12 out of 51) address parents' role, rights, and/or responsibilities;
- Less than half (22 out of 51) have tips or advice for parents in teaching their teen to drive;
- About one-quarter (12 out of 51) have instruction logs for parents to track their practice driving with their teen.

### **What DMVs Should Do**

Fortunately, Web content can be improved quickly. AAA encourages DMV officials to check their Web sites against the following criteria to ensure that residents can find basic information and tools to create safe teen drivers. There are also links to DMV sites that do a good job presenting this information.

### **DMV Home Page Has a Clear Link for Teen Driver Information**

A parent or teen visiting a DMV Web site should quickly be able to find the information that applies to them. It should be in plain language that someone unfamiliar with the licensure process will understand. Some states do this well:

Alaska: <http://www.state.ak.us/local/akpages/ADMIN/dmv/dmvhome.htm>

Connecticut: <http://www.ct.gov/dmv/site/default.asp>

South Dakota: [http://www.state.sd.us/dps/dl/Parents&Teens/P&T\\_Main.asp](http://www.state.sd.us/dps/dl/Parents&Teens/P&T_Main.asp)

Texas: [http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/administration/driver\\_licensing\\_control/dlindex.htm](http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/administration/driver_licensing_control/dlindex.htm)

### **Central Page for Teen Driver Information**

Safety officials should put the information that parents and their young drivers will need in one place. If they are left to find it for themselves, they might miss key information and resources. The following states do an especially good job of this:

Georgia: <http://www.dds.ga.gov/teens/index.aspx>

Maryland: <http://mva.state.md.us/DriverServ/ROOKIEDRIVER/default.htm>

Nevada: <http://www.dmvnv.com/nvdlteens.htm>

Wisconsin: <http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/drivers/drivers/gdl/>

### **Why Teen Crashes Are a Problem**

Car crashes are the number one cause of death for teens. Yet some DMV Web sites don't tell visitors of these dangers. DMV Web sites should tell parents and teens why it is critically important that they work within the graduated driver license process. Some states that address this are:

Connecticut: <http://www.ct.gov/dmv/lib/dmv/20/29/Howto.pdf> (page 4)

Minnesota: <http://www.dps.state.mn.us/dvs/DriverLicense/DL%20Info/DL%20frame.htm>

Wisconsin: <http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/library/publications/topic/safety/gdlpacket.pdf>

### **Parental Role/Responsibility**

Parents benefit from knowing what their roles are in helping their teen become a safe driver. A parent will have a chance to be a role model, coach, teacher, and manager as a teen learns to drive. Some states that discuss this are:

Maryland: <http://www.marylandmva.com/DriverServ/ROOKIEDRIVER/guide.htm>

Michigan: [http://www.michigan.gov/sos/0,1607,7-127-1627\\_8669\\_8998-22984--,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/sos/0,1607,7-127-1627_8669_8998-22984--,00.html)

Virginia: <http://www.dmv.state.va.us/webdoc/pdf/dmv16.pdf>

Wisconsin: <http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/library/publications/topic/safety/gdlpacket.pdf>

### **Parental Teaching Guide**

Parents play a huge part in the learning process for young drivers. States recognize this, with all but 10 requiring teens to log certified driving hours with an adult. States should provide significant guidance for parents as to how they should spend this time to maximize its effectiveness, but many do not. Here are some states that do:

Iowa: <http://www.dot.state.ia.us/mvd/ods/coach.pdf>

Connecticut: <http://www.ct.gov/dmv/lib/dmv/20/29/Howto.pdf>

Michigan: [http://www.michigan.gov/documents/gdl\\_parent\\_16316\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/gdl_parent_16316_7.pdf)

Nevada: <http://www.dmvnv.com/pdfforms/logbook.pdf>

### **Parent-Teen Driving Agreement/Contract**

Many parents find a written agreement helps establish clear guidelines for when, where, how, and with whom their teen drives. By agreeing ahead of time to family rules for safe driving, families can clearly establish consequences and reduce family conflict. Several states provide parent-teen driving agreements, including:

Georgia: <http://www.gahighwaysafety.org/pdf/tpda.pdf>

Maine: <http://mainegov-images.informe.org/sos/bmv/contract.pdf>

Michigan:

[http://www.michigan.gov/documents/DES\\_Parent-Teen\\_Safe\\_Driving\\_Contract\\_157407\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/DES_Parent-Teen_Safe_Driving_Contract_157407_7.pdf)

Ohio: [http://www.bmv.ohio.gov/driver\\_license/family\\_agreement.htm](http://www.bmv.ohio.gov/driver_license/family_agreement.htm)