

## Laws reduce teen traffic fatalities

by: NICOLE MARSHALL World Staff Writer

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Laws designed to ease teens into driving have reduced traffic fatalities involving younger drivers in Oklahoma and across the country, statistics show.

Graduated driver's license laws have also seemed to help change the attitudes of many teens as they take on the responsibilities of driving, local traffic authorities said.

In recognition of National Teen Driver Safety Week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released a report last week showing a decrease across the U.S. in the percentage of drivers involved in fatal crashes.

During 2004-08, the percentage of 16- to 17-year-old drivers involved in fatal crashes decreased by 36 percent, according to the CDC. Despite the drop, motor vehicle crashes remain the leading cause of death for teens.

Graduated driver's license laws provide for longer practice periods, limit newly licensed drivers under high-risk conditions and require greater participation of parents in their teens' driving process.

In May 1999, Oklahoma became the 33rd state to pass such a law. The statute was strengthened in 2005.

After the law went into effect, the number of 16- to 17-year-old drivers involved in fatal crashes decreased from a high of 69 in 2000 to a low of 35 in 2008, according to the Oklahoma Department of Public Safety's Highway Safety Office.

In 2009, 16- and 17-year-old drivers were involved in 37 fatal crashes, the Highway Safety Office reported Friday.

Also, the number of crashes involving drivers age 16 and 17 decreased 34.6 percent from 10,917 in 2000 to 7,077 in 2008.

Greg Nash, who has worked for the Oklahoma Driving School in Tulsa since 1996 and has taught driver's education for 25 years, said he believes that the graduated driver's license law has made a difference.

It just took teens some time to get adjusted to the change, he said.

"I think a lot of kids, when they first started, were a little upset because their older brothers or sisters did not have to do the same things," Nash said.

But over time, the teens have come to accept the law, he said, and many have become more responsible in their driving behaviors.

"I think most kids want to be responsible and don't want to get the sad news if they know someone who is killed in a car crash," Nash said.

Oklahoma Highway Patrol Lt. George Brown said he also believes that the law helped reduce fatalities because it limits the amount of time teens can be driving.

"That limits the number of places that they can drive to," Brown said. "By narrowing the scope of their driving habits, hopefully that creates safer driving for everyone."

### Drivers age 16 and 17 involved in fatal crashes 2000-2009

Year	Number of drivers
2000	69
2001	56

2002	46
2003	44
2004	46
2005	48
2006	40
2007	37
2008	35
2009	37

Source: Oklahoma Department of Public Safety, Highway Safety Office

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#### Associate Images:



**A student driver practices maneuvers during a lesson at the Oklahoma Driving School in Tulsa. Graduated driver's license laws require longer practice periods and put additional restrictions on young drivers. JAMES GIBBARD / Tulsa World file**

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