



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Local Teens Experience Dangers of Distracted Driving Firsthand

Richmond, VA – DRIVE SMART Virginia’s distracted driving simulator is coming to town! This educational program includes a virtual reality simulation installed into a full-size vehicle. Participants drive through real-life road scenarios and experience the dangers one can encounter on the road. Students at Indian River High School in Chesapeake will be required to maneuver around pedestrians, avoid parked vehicles, and adhere to the rules of the road, all while manipulating a cell phone.

The program was created by traffic safety nonprofit DRIVE SMART Virginia in response to the fact that car crashes are the leading cause of death for teens in America. The organization hosted focus groups and asked teens what they thought would change their driving behavior. Surprisingly, many said they needed to experience the dangers firsthand in order change their habits behind the wheel.

“We had to think outside the box when creating this program,” said Janet Brooking, Executive Director of DRIVE SMART Virginia. “We wanted this to be an effective way to educate teens in a safe and engaging environment. Our participant surveys have shown the program is working, with 95% of teens surveyed saying they would recommend the program to their peers.”

80% of those surveyed also answered that they would be less likely to drive distracted after participating in this program, a clear sign of success. “In the past eight years, tens of thousands of teens have participated in this program thanks to crucial grant funding from State Farm,” said Brooking.

“As the largest insurance company in the United States, State Farm sees the toll teen crashes take on families,” said Dwayne Redd, State Farm spokesperson. “We help reduce these tragedies by teaming up with DRIVE SMART Virginia to support their teen driver educational program.”

Along with the distracted driving simulator, students will experience the dangers of impaired driving with a pedal cart obstacle course. This course uses goggles that simulate different impairment levels to demonstrate the difficulty of driving under the influence of alcohol. DRIVE SMART Virginia partners with local community groups such as trauma centers, law enforcement agencies and victim advocates to expand the educational programming by bringing real-world stories to students.

DRIVE SMART Virginia will be visiting Indian River High School in Chesapeake on **May 8th**

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About DRIVE SMART Virginia

DRIVE SMART Virginia is a nonprofit organization charged with raising awareness and changing driver behavior in order to improve the safety of the roadways of the Commonwealth. We work to improve the lives of all Virginians through our public information and education initiatives. Founded in 1995, the organization is led by a diverse board representing safety advocates, the insurance industry and law enforcement, among others. Our mission is advanced by fostering community partnerships, creating educational campaigns, designing and distributing educational materials, making presentations, attending outreach events, and advocating for traffic safety initiatives. Learn more about DRIVE SMART Virginia by visiting www.drivesmartva.org.