

# Tracking teens may make for safer roads, but less trust may result

By Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, adapted by Newsela

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When Brookfield (Wis.) Central High School student Chloe Olier started driving earlier this summer, her parents Dany and Virginie installed a device that records video whenever she makes driving mistakes. It's called a DriveCam.

Chloe wasn't pleased. It emails missteps to her parents, who review the footage online with her.

"I felt violated, because it was going to be recording me," the 16-year-old said. Chloe now says she'd recommend it to her friends because it has made her a better driver. The machine was obtained for free from the family's auto insurer, American Family Insurance. It recorded her 23 times the first week. Now she only makes sporadic mistakes.

"It's nice because it tells me what I'm doing wrong so I don't do it anymore," she said. It's only intrusive while it's recording, "so in order not to feel that way, I drive well." Research shows that electronic monitoring devices can reduce risky driving behavior by teenagers, and a growing number of insurance companies and auto manufacturers are offering new products. But they are slow to catch on.

## Tracking Useful Or An Invasion Of Privacy?

Olier said she was the only one among her peers with a driving monitor. In interviews with Milwaukee-area families, many felt the devices infringed upon the trust they had with their children.

According to American Family Insurance, 15,000 families have used the DriveCam in 19 states since it launched in 2007. The company has recorded 65 percent to 70 percent reductions in distractions, tailgating, poor scanning, intentionally unsafe driving and speeding.

A 2009 study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety showed that a device called Tiwi, which also reports unsafe driving, significantly reduced risky driving behavior. The best results came when teenagers had a chance to modify their behavior before the device sent alerts to parents.

"Parents should consider using the devices, because our research shows they can be effective," said Russ Rader, a spokesman for the institute, who said the devices have often been a hard sell to parents. "The monitoring is a way for a parent to be a virtual passenger supervising their teen when they're not physically in the passenger seat."

Mike Gonzalez of Waukesha, Wis., whose 17-year-old son, Chris, got his license recently, said he wasn't considering using any technology for monitoring.

"They have to make their own decisions and make their own lives," he said. "A driver's license means he's mature and he has to learn more about life."

"You need to teach them and then trust them to be able to do the right thing," said Mary Beth Mills of Fox Point, Wis. Her 16-year-old son is learning to drive.

## The Riskiest Drivers

That trust, however, appears generous compared to facts. Teenagers are the riskiest drivers and the most likely to crash. Motor vehicle accidents are the No. 1 cause of death for Wisconsin teenagers, for example, according to the most recent statistics obtained from the Department of Health.

A recent State Farm survey identified what it called a dangerous trust gap between parents and children. While around 70 percent of parents in the survey thought their teenagers were “almost always” obeying graduated licensing restrictions, as few as 43 percent of teenagers said they almost always followed them. Graduated licensing laws impose curfews, passenger limits and other rules on new, young drivers to reduce risky driving.

Jeff Pierson, a driving instructor in Milwaukee who owns Safety First Driving School, thought his teenage son was a great driver. Then, one day, he trailed him as he drove with friends.

“I tell parents: Two weeks after they’ve got their license and they know friends are going to be with them, follow them. I was so shocked. As soon as two girls were on the ride, he burned rubber,” Pierson said. “When you get three to four kids in a car, it’s a party. It’s just play time.”

### Products To Make Driving Safer

While teen monitoring devices aren’t popular, more insurance companies are offering a greater array of products since the devices emerged around seven years ago, said Loretta Worters, a spokeswoman for the Insurance Information Institute. For example, Progressive has a black box that records speeds and braking times, and 21st Century Auto Insurance offers a GPS monitoring system called MobileTEEN. It lets parents set location boundaries, curfews and maximum speed limits.

Automakers have also joined the market. In 2010, Ford released a MyKey feature that the company says 6 million cars now have, controlling factors such as speed and radio volume, and blocking incoming calls and texts. The Automobile Dealers Association of Mega Milwaukee is evaluating a product called SeatBeltGuard, which alerts parents if their teenage drivers aren’t buckled up, as well as disabling texts and calls, according to President Jim Tolkán.

Another company, a Wisconsin startup called TeenGrasshopper, is trying to tackle the invasiveness of the technology by shifting the burden of monitoring to other drivers. Its “How’s my driving?” decals allow other drivers to directly connect with teenagers’ parents by calling an 800 number.

A bunch of smartphone apps allow parents to locate their teenagers via their phones, like iPhone’s Find My Friends. Chris Anderson of Delafield, Wis., said she and her husband will likely use smartphone technology to check on their 16-year-old son, Grant, who got his license in October.

“I’m a firm believer in trusting your child, but also checking in from time to time to make sure they are where they’re supposed to be,” she said.

<http://newsela.com/articles/teen-tracking/id/1680/>