

SADD, AAA promote safe teen drivers at Allen East

March 28, 2012 7:05 PM

LIMA — Max McAdoo admits to sending the occasional text message while behind the wheel of his car. The Allen East High School junior said it isn't something he does frequently. After his experience Wednesday, texting and driving is likely to be even less frequent, he said.

Max was one of dozens of Allen East students to take a seat behind the wheel of the Ohio Department of Transportation's distracted driving simulator on Wednesday.

“I don't usually text and drive. I'm not going to lie, I've done it before,” Max, 16, said. “I almost had three accidents in there. It was kind of scary seeing how it could happen to you.”

The simulator was part of a series of daylong programs aimed at increasing teen driver safety awareness and promoting positive decision-making, according to Kelly Prichard, adviser of Students Against Destructive Decisions at Allen East.

“These kids are in vehicles and a lot of them are unsafe. They are taught to drive in a quick five-session course and then they're let loose on the roads with cellphones and iPods and GPS and all kinds of things to distract them,” Prichard said. “I don't think they have any idea how the distracted driving impairs their driving. I think they think of impairment as being drugs or alcohol.”

In addition to ODOT's simulator, the Allen East SADD group also collaborated with AAA Ohio Auto Club for a free vehicle maintenance inspection. Kimberly Schwind, spokeswoman for the auto club, said the event — the first of more than a dozen such events this spring — helps check for any problems that may pose a safety risk.

“We do this because teen drivers are notorious for crashes. Car crashes remain the leading cause of death for teenagers,” Schwind said. “We really want to make sure these teens are safe behind the wheel. Good car maintenance is a big step in that direction.”

Students attending Wednesday's event were also asked to sign a pledge not to text and drive.

“It's really important for me that they take the pledge and mean it,” said Ashley Neal, 17, a senior SADD officer at the school. “I really want them to sign it so they'll do their best to not get distracted while they drive. The last thing I want is one of my fellow classmates to get into a wreck and get hurt.”

Cheyenne Sweigart, 18, a senior and also a SADD officer at the school, said it is important to support any initiative that promotes both safety and awareness.

“You can't control what kids do if you're not in the car with them but anything can help,” she said. “If you're making sure your cars are OK even though you're not there you're still trying to protect them.”

Experiencing the distracted driving simulator definitely had an impact on Max, he said.

“After something like this you're going to pay attention more,” he said. “You're going to relate it to this experience — what if something like that simulator happens here. You've got to be prepared.”