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## **Wethersfield and Rocky Hill High Schools Sponsoring Teen Safety Belt Challenges**

The Central CT Health District in collaboration with the CT Children's Medical Center received funding from State Farm Insurance to coordinate a Teen Safety Belt Challenge with two district high schools during the months of April and May 2009.

The students plan out a variety of interventions over a four week period with the goal to increase seat belt use among their peers. A pre and post seat belt check is conducted before and after school to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. The schools are then awarded a \$300 participation award and a plaque for completing the program that may be used towards a senior event of their choice.

A similar program was conducted in Hennepin County, Minnesota in 2008. Eleven schools completed the challenge and all of them saw an increase in their seat belt use rate. The most improved school saw a 30% increase (50% at the start up to 80% at the end). The best over all use rate at 97%.

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for U.S. teens, accounting for 36% of all deaths in this age group. In 2004, 4,767 teens ages 16 to 19 died of injuries caused by motor vehicle crashes (CDC 2006). The risk of motor vehicle crashes is higher among 16- to 19-year-olds than other age groups. Per mile driven, teen drivers ages 16 to 19 are four times more likely than older drivers to crash (IIHS 2006). Add to this, in 2002, the estimated economic cost of police-reported crashes (fatal and nonfatal) involving drivers ages 15 to 20 was \$40.8 billion (NHTSA 2003).

Chances are this year someone you know will be involved in a car crash. And if they are unbuckled, that person is 50 percent more likely to be injured or killed in that crash. For many people, increasing seat belt use has become less of a priority. The simple fact, it has been proven that wearing seat belts is the single most effective way to save lives and reduce injuries on our roadways.

**For more information please call Hilary Norcia at 665-8571.**