

TEEN DRIVERS' TURN SIGNAL USE INCREASES WITH ALERTS

When driving, do you always signal turns and lane changes, or do you just do it sometimes? By now, most drivers have experienced or at least heard of some of the newest alerts now available on most new vehicles, including the lane departure warning feature (see Did You Know article from October) and forward collision warning. The lane departure warning feature warns the driver that drifts out of the driving lane without using the turn signal. This is quite common with a lane change – it seems far too many drivers fail to signal an intended lane change, which, incidentally, is required by law.

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) recently conducted an interesting study of teen drivers and what effect crash avoidance systems have on them. Crash avoidance systems monitor driver input and the environment around the vehicle and warn the driver of a potential collision. The systems could be especially beneficial to young beginning drivers. Real-time feedback on their driving could help teens develop safer habits.

To explore this possibility, IIHS undertook a naturalistic driving study with the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute and Honda. The study is the first to evaluate how novice drivers respond to warnings from crash avoidance systems. Researchers examined whether the warning systems altered teens' driving in terms of headway maintenance, lane keeping and turn-signal use, and whether any changes were sustained after warnings were disabled. They also looked at distraction.

Teens drove more than 90,000 miles and logged about 10,000 events that triggered warnings. Seventy-three percent of the warnings were for lane drifts, often because the driver failed to signal an intentional lane change. Forward collision alerts accounted for 8 percent of all warnings logged.

The results of the study found that crash avoidance warning features help teenage drivers improve their turn-signal use and stay in their travel lanes but appear to increase the time they spend following vehicles at close distances. This is logical, as drivers don't want passengers to know that they did something to trigger a crash avoidance alert. Similarly, drivers tailgated more when equipped with the forward collision warning system indicating that the drivers were relying on the warning system to let them know when they should brake.

Although the study was applicable to teen drivers, I would assume it would have the same results with older drivers.

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