

Students given somber reminder of dangers of alcohol, distracted driving

[Craig Shoup](#), Reporter 6:07 p.m. ET May 16, 2017

Students watch a mock crash at Ross High School depicting the dangers of drinking and driving. Craig Shoup/The News-Messenger



In this mock crash at Ross High School, a Sandusky County EMS responder drapes a white blanket over a 'dead' passenger. (Photo: Craig Shoup/The News-Messenger) Buy Photo

FREMONT - As she prepares to begin driving, Fremont St. Joseph Central Catholic sophomore Rihanna Miller, along with fellow classmates and Ross High School students, were given a sobering reminder of the dangers of drinking and driving.

Miller and hundreds of other students witnessed a mock crash involving students like them who played the role of drunk drivers, shattering their thoughts that a traffic crash would never affect them.

"It hits home," Miller said Tuesday. "It's a lot to take in, but it is crazy."

To save lives and educate students on the dangers of drunk or distracted driving, this year's program was called "Keep Dreams Alive."



Students from St. Joseph Central Catholic look on during a mock crash demonstration at Ross High School. Students were shown a fatal crash caused by drunken driving with students their own age. (Photo: Craig Shoup/The News-Messenger)

Miller, who is studying to get her driver's license, said the crash was a grim reminder to avoid alcohol, as well as texting or other types of distracted driving.

The crash serves as a reminder to students finishing prom season and preparing for graduation that one bad choice could change your life forever.

Jesus Cruz, a student at Ross High School, played the driver who had too much to drink at a party but felt he would be fine to drive his father's car.

Cruz's passenger, Austin Underwood, was in the front seat and was not wearing his seat belt when the mock crash occurred, sending Underwood through the windshield. He died just minutes before Sandusky County EMS arrived.

Morgan Hawk and Sophia Militello were back seat passengers and sustained major injuries that would require hours of surgery and result in a lifetime of pain.

Though the scars from their injuries would heal, the two would have emotional scars from the crash, knowing they could have prevented it if they had taken the keys from Cruz.



Fremont attorney Chris Fiegl plays a parent of a student in a mock crash who was just told that his son was dead. (Photo: Craig Shoup/The News-Messenger)

As for Cruz, the pain of the crash was minimal, though a field sobriety test conducted by officers responding to the fake crash revealed driver impairment.

The 18-year-old was arrested, and because one passenger died and two were injured, Cruz was charged with felony aggravated vehicular homicide and two counts of felony vehicular assault.

A person convicted of those crimes could face prison time, lifetime suspension of his driver's license, fines, and be subject to paying restitution to families of the crash victims.

In Sandusky County, the Ohio Highway Patrol has conducted 170 stops for driving under the influence and has responded to two fatal crashes so far this year.



A passenger, played by Morgan Hawk, is taken by Life Flight to Toledo as part of a mock crash at Ross High School. (Photo: Craig Shoup/The News-Messenger)

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