

IT CAN WAIT

Coventry High gets the message from state Attorney General, police



Jessica Boisclair • Daily Times

Rhode Island Attorney General Peter Kilmartin addresses Coventry High students yesterday as part of the state's "It Can Wait" campaign against texting and driving. 400 Oakers pledged not to during the event.

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COVENTRY — AT&T's campaign against texting and driving communicated a powerful message to seniors Thursday morning — "It can wait."

Attorney General Peter Kilmartin, members of the RI State Police, the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) and AT&T are working to make teenagers aware of the dangers of texting while driving.

RIDOT State Traffic Engineer Robert Rocchio explained each year there are more than 50,000 crashes in Rhode Island.

"My job at the DOT is to analyze those crashes and try to find out why they are happening and how we prevent them from happening," he said. "It used to be seatbelts, booze and speed; those were the three things we had to change to get the fatalities down to



Maj. David Tikoian of the RI State Police related his story of responding to an accident where the victim had been texting.

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"IT CAN WAIT" CAMPAIGN

- Sponsored by AT&T in cooperation with the state attorney general's office, state police, and DOT.
- More drivers are becoming distracted by texting than in the past, resulting in a larger percentage of the 50,000 crashed in RI every year.
- Attorney General Peter Kilmartin and Major David Tikoian of the RISP, among others, are visiting high schools and spreading the message.

zero."

Rocchio told the students that with growth of technology, people are becoming more distracted because of texting and driving.

"The messages you send each other are important," said AT&T New England President Patricia Jacobs. "Its how you stay connected with your friends and family. At AT&T we are here to tell you one message today, whatever text message you have to send — it can wait."

Seniors were shown a documentary made by AT&T in 2010 titled "The Last Text." The video presented various families who had been affected by texting and driving.

"When I see those families who have lost a loved one or those people who killed someone, they aren't actors, its reality," said Attorney General Kilmartin. "So many times we say, 'it can't happen to us.' You're probably sitting next to your best friend,

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Coventry HS takes pledge

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boyfriend or girlfriend; now look at that seat and imagine it empty because of something like this.”

In 2009, when Attorney General Kilmartin was a State Representative, he sponsored legislation making it illegal to text and drive in Rhode Island.

Rhode Island State Police Major David Tikoian explained to the students that in 2010 he worked as a weekend officer. During his shift he responded to an early morning crash. The young man operating the vehicle was distracted by texting and driving and lost control and struck a barrier in the road. The vehicle skidded across the highway and traveled 311 feet into a tree. Major Tikoian said the male had to be taken by helicopter to Rhode Island hospital; fortunately the crash was not fatal.

According a survey conducted by AT&T, 97 percent of teenagers say texting and driving is dangerous but 43 percent admit to doing it anyway; 75 percent of teenagers say “it is common among their friends.”

“The national highway traffic safety administration states that sending or receiving a text takes the driver’s eyes away from the road for four to six seconds,” he said. “That’s the equivalent of driving the entire length of a football field if you were going 55 mph. I’d like to salute all the students of Coventry high school; I’d like to salute you because you made a conscious decision to sign a pledge promising not to text and drive.”

Approximately 400 students from the high school took that pledge, signing their names throughout the presentation.