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Media should help urge driver safety

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As president of the Driving School Association of Louisiana and owner of First Class Driving School here in the Ark-La-Tex, I cringe every time I watch the news or read an article regarding a vehicle crash. As a professional traffic safety advocate, I actively sift through each detail given, seeking relevant information. After all, aren't car crashes reported so the public becomes more aware of the dangers and we learn not to repeat the mistakes?

The frustration to me is that pertinent details often are left out of the story. Just recently, I heard a report about "One teen killed, three others critically injured." No more details. Were they speeding? Was alcohol involved? Did they have their safety belts on? When there is a fatality in our state, usually one (or all three) of these choices were made poorly. How can we expect the general driving public to change if it hears the same thing over and over again? Same result, different person. With a little effort, a reporter can get these three facts. I feel it is the media's responsibility to help the public make an informed decision about its own safety. Every time there is a fatality we need to know if a safety belt was worn. We need to know if a violation occurred. We need to know if drugs were suspected or definitely used.

One other important point, why is it we refer to these predictable, preventable collisions, injuries and fatalities as "accidents?" Insurance companies tell us that between 85 and 95 percent of all crashes are preventable. If we keep using a word that implies that these crashes were an act of God, or by chance, how are we going to change driver behavior? The media and traffic safety advocates need to step up and set a good example of how to speak properly when referring to a car crash. I am certain that if you talk to the parents of a person killed by a drunken driver, they will not feel that is an accident. It is a very predictable, preventable event that happens way too often to refer to as an accident.

We in the traffic safety business know the automobile is the leading killer of Americans, from ages 1 to 34. We know the public is more at risk of becoming a victim of a vehicle crash than any other crime. We know police officers and

firefighters are more likely to be injured or killed driving to or from a call, than actually making the call. We know that of the almost 600 unbelted Louisianans killed on our roadways last year, about 300 of them would be alive today if they had their safety belt on. Why didn't they? They lacked the time or inclination to study the results of car crashes and were not educated in the benefits of the safety belt. But they read the newspaper and watch the news daily.

Louisiana is a wonderful state with great people and much to offer: We must make an effort to change. Take a pro-active role do not wait for a car crash to touch us personally. I think our insurance premiums alone should be an indication the direction we are moving is not a preferable one.

Charles "Bud" **Chauncy** lives in Benton.