

Navy Getting On Board With "Save a Life Tour"



Navy photo by MC2 Leah Stiles

"Save a Life Tour" co-founder Brian Beldyga (left) shows that tunnel vision is the most dangerous part of driving while drunk.

Beldyga said about 70 percent of drunk-driving fatalities are the result of tunnel vision, a narrowing of the eye's focus as blood-alcohol levels rise. The result is less concentration on what is happening outside the peripheral area of the driver's lane. "Save a Life Tour" simulates this tunnel vision to give a startling wake-up of how impaired a driver can become while under the influence.

"It really feels like you're operating something impaired," said a ship's executive officer. "The simulator not only reminds us that driving drunk is dangerous, but that you really need to be checking the mirrors and looking around."

According to a PO3, "It was hard... it was not a joke. Here [*behind the wheel of the simulator*], we can all laugh, but out there, crashing into a building isn't funny."

Not that the Sailors are left to crash and burn, so to speak. Beldyga stands by their sides and shows them how to beat the machine. "I give them every opportunity to beat it," he says, "but they can't, and if you can't do it sober, with my help, then don't tell me you can go out and do it in real life."

One ship's safety officer was enthusiastic about the impact "Save a Life Tour" makes, especially two graphic videos in the program that show drunk-driving victims—some while they're in the operating room of a hospital's emergency ward. "We want to show our Sailors, graphically, the risk of drinking and driving," the safety officer explained.

Beldyga sums up the "Save a Life Tour" message like this: "Be there for your friends. Take their keys, and don't let them drive. It's as simple as that." ■

With 17,000 Americans reportedly killed and more than 700,000 injured annually in alcohol-related traffic crashes, it's understandable why the Navy is stepping up their efforts to educate Sailors on the hazards of drunken driving. The newest tool in this effort is a \$2.5-million drunk-driving simulator and display called "Save a Life Tour," which travels to military installations, as well as schools and colleges, year-round.

The "Save a Life Tour" senior manager, Brian Beldyga, lost his fiancée in a drunk-driving incident. He hits people hard with an in-your-face attitude as he instructs Sailors during a 30-minute demonstration on the effects of drinking and driving. After a brief introduction, Beldyga lets Sailors take the wheel of the simulator for three minutes. During that time, their control of the car becomes delayed and peripheral vision becomes fuzzy as they simulate going from sober to drunk (with a blood-alcohol content of 0.34, more than three times the legal limit in most states).

"I couldn't focus at all," said one young, seagoing seaman recruit. "Nothing I could do corrected what the simulator was doing."