

STATE OF NEW MEXICO
County of Luna

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Media Release

Juniors and seniors at Deming High School began prom week on a somber note, but had a fun and safe finish thanks to a collaboration of local agencies.

Students began the week with the opportunity to witness firsthand the dangers of drinking and driving through the “Every 15 Minutes program,” held Tuesday, April 26.

As juniors and seniors headed into prom weekend, organizers held a mock drunk driving accident. Students and staff at the school played victims in the crash, which featured wrecked vehicles and makeup to simulate injuries. The event takes its name from the statistic that an alcohol-related crash happens every fifteen minutes somewhere in the United States, however current statistics show a positive improvement to 30 minutes between every crash. Despite the improvement, local agencies feel there is still work to be done to prevent underage drinking and driving while intoxicated.

“This was my second time helping with the event, and it was still as powerful as ever,” Teresa Ortberg, Luna County DWI Program preventionist, said. “Even knowing it was simulated, it’s still emotional to see what first responders deal with far too often because of the consequences of drunk driving.”

The Deming Police Department, Deming Fire Department and Luna County Sheriff’s Office simulated a response to the crash, and used the equipment they would normally use, including the “jaws of life” prying device to open crushed vehicles. Staff from the Juvenile Probation Officer were also on hand to help coordinate the event.

While first responders worked to rescue those trapped inside the vehicles, a group of students with faces painted like skulls watched from the side while holding grave stones marked with their names. The group, known as the “walking dead,” were meant to symbolize how any of the students could be killed in drunk driving accidents.

The demonstration concluded with a police officer giving a sobriety test to the student playing an intoxicated driver. After failing the test, the driver was handcuffed, taken to a police cruiser and driven away.

Following the demonstration, students were taken inside the DHS Auditorium to listen to testimonials from those who participated in the mock accident. Senior Dante Urrea read an emotional poem describing how drunk driving can be a fatal mistake.

“You could tell the students and staff were really impacted by Dante’s poem,” Jessica Jara, director of the Luna County Youth Prevention and Advocacy Coalition, said. Her program helped with the event and she dressed as the Grim Reaper during the demonstration. “I really feel the lesson that day was taken to heart by everyone in attendance. Hopefully the event will help prevent the real thing.”

The DWI Program took its efforts a step further on Saturday evening after prom by hosting “Buzz Free,” an alternative to house parties hosted at Luna County Starmax. Over 270 students attended and were treated to games, music, bowling, movies and door prizes. Using revenue generated from advertisements sold over the bowling lanes, over \$4,000 in door prizes were given out to students in attendance. The event was orchestrated by 15 volunteers. Edith Vazquez, who heads the DWI Program, expressed her appreciation to the volunteers and Starmax.

“The event was a success due to the outstanding community support we receive,” she said. “I can say it was a success because there were no juvenile DWI arrests or accidents over the weekend. I believe our collaborative efforts helped contribute to that.”

Luna County DWI and the YPAC each work with coalitions of community members to address substance abuse in the community. Specifically, Luna County DWI focuses on the prevention of underage drinking and intoxicated driving by youth and adults while YPAC uses environmental strategies to prevent underage drinking and prescription drug abuse. For more information about the programs or other volunteer opportunities, contact (575) 543-6524.

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PHOTO CAPTIONS

A member of the “Walking Dead” watches the Every 15 Minutes program held at Deming High School.

The Grim Reaper watches as first responders attempt to rescue a victim of the mock DWI accident held during the Every 15 Minutes program at Deming High School.