Car crashes kill more young people than any other cause, accounting for nearly half of all teen deaths in America each year. More than 5,000 U.S. teens die each year in car crashes – more than 400 of them in Texas. Car crashes involving teenage drivers cost our nation more than $41 billion every year; the annual cost in Texas is more than $3.5 billion. For every teen killed in a car crash, about 100 more are injured.

The most common causes of teen driving crashes are the ones that young drivers (and their parents) know the least about. Combined with a lack of driving experience, the top three dangers are: 1. Driving at night, 2. Speeding and street racing, and 3. Distractions, such as cell phones / texting and too many teen passengers.

Alcohol and low seat belt use create dangers, as well, but not as frequently as the top three causes. Most teens are unaware of the driving restrictions imposed on them by the Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) laws in Texas, and serious crashes are more frequent for teens learning through parent-taught driver education.

To address this persistent public health problem, TTI in 2002 created Teens in the Driver Seat® — the first peer-to-peer program for teens that focuses solely on traffic safety and addresses all major risks for this age group. Teens help shape the program and are responsible for implementing it; TTI provides the science, guidance and project resources. TDS has demonstrated its effectiveness in numerous ways.

- Risk awareness levels have increased by up to 200 percent.
- Cell phone use at TDS program schools has been shown to drop by 30 percent, and seat belt use has gone up by over 14 percent.
- In Texas, the number of teenage drivers involved in fatal crashes has dropped 40 percent since the TDS program began. By comparison, fatal crashes involving drivers 20 years of age and older has only dropped 16 percent in Texas.
- In a detailed case study, the City of Garland experienced 12 teen traffic fatalities in the four years before launching a TDS program; the same city has seen only one teen traffic death in the four years since launching TDS. Before TDS, teen involvement in all crashes was 28 percent; after TDS the teen involvement in crashes dropped to 16 percent.

More than 400 schools in Texas now have implemented TDS programs, reaching more than 500,000 teens per year. The program is now being deployed in three states outside Texas.