



“Every Fifteen Minutes” Synopsis – Walla Walla County

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for teens 15-18 years of age in the United States. The greatest dangers for teen drivers are alcohol consumption, inconsistent or no seat belt use, distracted and drowsy driving, and speeding. “*Every Fifteen Minutes*” is an intense program designed to relate to students the responsibility they have to drive sober and safely every trip, every time.

The program was originally designed when, on the average, an individual was killed every 15 minutes due to an alcohol related crash. Through awareness and education, those numbers have decreased! Now, “Every 15 Minutes” includes all categories/types of collisions. With 94% of fatalities being driver error, we believe it is important to address all areas in our program, but we will still concentrate on impaired and distracted driving. Although the program is intended for high school seniors, most of whom have had some driving experience, it may be adapted to the entire high school depending on the school population.

DAY ONE

Officers and EMS personnel meet with the students and discuss topics related to impaired and distracted driving, alcohol poisoning and the responsibility of making mature decisions when lives are at stake. They discuss the responsibility that each of us share when choosing to drive impaired or when they allow others to.

Throughout the day, pre-selected students are removed from the classroom *every 15 minutes* by the “grim reaper”. Volunteers transform the students into the “walking dead” by painting their faces white and having them wear black robes or shirts. The students return to their class and resume being seated. They represent those who die annually nationwide in traffic fatalities. They do not speak or take part in any activity for the rest of the day. After school, they are transported to the facility where they will be kept overnight and chaperoned by adult volunteers. During the afternoon and evening they work on putting together the program which will be given to the entire senior class (or school) on Day Two.

While the students are busy with evening activities, officers and/or the county coroner contact the parents of two students. The officers give these parents a simulated death notification, telling them the child will not be coming home because he or she was killed by an impaired or distracted driver. **The parents are pre-selected and have agreed to participate.** They have also agreed to attend the assembly and share with the students their feelings.

DAY TWO

The assembly begins with a slide presentation of photos of students who participated in the “Every Fifteen Minutes” the first day along with school staff, other students and the police officers and volunteers on campus who helped with the program. Next, the students present a skit dramatizing a teenage keg party where one of the teenagers ends up getting drunk, driving away from the party and killing an innocent person in an auto accident.

If there is a student who volunteers to read his/her letter written the previous night, it would be presented next.

Then the parents talk to the audience about the simulated death message they received the night before. This is a very emotional part of the program where the parents describe the feeling of losing their child at the hand of an impaired driver. Next a local citizen, victim or offender, tells of the drunken driving fatality they were involved in. The scene ends when the students make a pledge not to drink and drive and encourage the remaining student audience to make this same promise.

(Part of the effectiveness of the program is due to the “surprise” element. The participating students have been asked not to share the details nor the event dates with their classmates.)