

# There's safety in numbers? New law says 'No'

Restrictions go into effect for teen drivers

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After catching a movie at Colorado Mills, Lakewood residents **Erica Douglas** and **Yelin Lee** resigned themselves to the fate of most 15-year-olds — they waited for their ride.

Thanks to the new graduated license laws that went into effect July 1, Douglas and Lee will have to wait even longer before they can get behind the wheel and drive to the mall with their friends.

Late last week legislation went into effect restricting drivers under the age of 18 from having passengers under the age of 21 for the first six months they have their license. Also, teen drivers may have only one passenger under the age of 21 for the second six months after they receive their licenses.

Exceptions to the new provisions include immediate family members, medical emergencies and occasions when a person of at least 21 years, who has held a driver's license for at least one year, is in the car.

Although the new red tape might put a wrinkle in their social plans,



Photo by CHRIS STARK

Larry Rickey of Rocky Mountain Driving Academy in Lakewood checks the parking job of Steven Zbrozek, 15, of Littleton. A new State law forbids drivers under the age of 18 from having more than one passenger under the age of 21 for the first six months of driving.

Douglas and Lee aren't opposed to the changes.

"I think it's good because if you get too many people in the car you get distracted," said Lee.

Douglas, who went to the Department of Motor Vehicles to get her learner's permit that afternoon, agreed the law is well intended but is skeptical about its efficacy.

"It won't be followed much," she said.

If, as Douglas predicts, young drivers do not abide by the new rules, they can be fined as much as \$50, and lose as many as two points from their licenses for each illegal passenger they are caught carrying.

Sixteen-year-old **Chris Hoemke** is one step closer to the freedom

## LAWMAKERS JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND?

Passenger restrictions aren't the only laws taking effect that will affect the driving life of teens:

- As of July 1, with some exceptions including school activities and employment, drivers under the age of 18 are not allowed on the road between 12 a.m. and 5 a.m. Previously the curfew applied to drivers under the age of 17.
- On August 10, drivers under the age of 18 who have only a learner's permit will be prohibited from driving with cell phones.

driving can offer — he just got a job so his parents would think about letting him get a permit. He is not as copacetic about the limit as Douglas and Lee.

"It's punishing people for no reason," said Hoemke, who was training at the King Soopers in Golden.

Manitou Springs Mayor **Marcy Morrison** is accustomed to hearing from people who have misgivings about capping the number of teens per inexperienced driver.

The former Colorado House rep-

resentative led an effective crusade for a more conservative protocol for minor drivers in 1999. However, despite two attempts, she failed to sell passenger restrictions.

"I want to deprive them so they have a wonderful lifespan," Morrison said.

Much like the members of the Colorado Teen Driving Coalition, which propelled the passenger restriction through the legislature this year, Morrison was motivated in part by startling statistics.

Last year 96 teens were killed in auto accidents statewide, 80 percent in accidents involving teen drivers, according to the Colorado Department of Transportation.

Besides the younger set, the new limits will impact parents.

"I can understand because of the need to concentrate, and to not goof around," **Karen Zborek** said of the new limit when she dropped off her 15-year-old son for a driving lesson at Rocky Mountain Driving Academy in Lakewood.

Still, she has reservations.

"If they were to go to a movie everyone is in his own car and it's not always good to be separate. There are some places where there is safety in numbers," Zborek said.

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