

KFRS launches shocking poster campaign to encourage careful driving

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Road traffic accidents account for ten times more deaths than fire accidents

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Kent Fire and Rescue Service tackles dangerous driving by young people

The campaign will be launched at Larkfield Fire Station on Tuesday, 24 November.

The shocking image of a young girl in a body bag is set to adorn the backs of buses as **Kent Fire and Rescue Service** (KFRS) steps up its push to tackle dangerous driving by young people.

"Reckless driving: cut it out before we have to cut you out!" is the warning from firefighters who are supporting this hard-hitting poster by describing their own harrowing experiences of attending car crashes involving teenagers.

Among them is Larkfield Crew Manager Peter Colwill who was sent to a fatal crash involving four young people near Maidstone three years ago.

"I'll never forget that shout; the car was on the roof and one of the youngsters was already dead. We had to cut him out of the car so we could get to another casualty," he recalls. "I was teaching my own 17-year-old son to drive at the time and for weeks afterwards I would wake up imagining Thomas's face in that smashed up car."

The poster focuses on the slightly bloodied face of a young girl in a partially unzipped body bag, with a fire engine and crashed car and the surviving driver in the background. The accompanying text reads: "Jack and Jill sped up the hill but crashed on a dicey corner. Jack broke down - he'd played the clown and killed a precious daughter". The campaign will be launched at Larkfield Fire Station on Tuesday, 24 November.

KFRS's Head of community Safety, Stuart Skilton, explained the purpose of the project: "We attend around 1,200 road traffic collisions each year, that's 25 per cent more than the number of house fires and results in around 10 times more deaths on the roads compared with fires. Unfortunately, if you are going to get hurt anywhere in Kent, statistically, it is a sad fact that it will be more than likely on our roads.

"Young drivers are disproportionately involved in a large number of these crashes and it's our firefighters who have to cut them and their passengers free, so when they are badly hurt or killed, our crews see much more than just a statistic."



The "Jack and Jill" campaign was initially launched in 2008 and provoked a positive reaction

The "Jack and Jill" campaign was initially launched in 2008 and provoked such a positive reaction when used during schools' visits and community safety events by KFRS staff that it was decided to reinforce the message by displaying it on buses. This latest campaign phase will run across the county from October, throughout the winter, as part of KFRS's ongoing objective to reduce the number of road traffic collisions occurring in Kent and Medway.

Stuart continues: "This poster is deliberately hard-hitting but with a very simple message that we hope raises awareness about the consequences of reckless driving. While we would never intend to upset people, especially those who have suffered from such a tragedy, we hope it does shock drivers - not just younger motorists - into taking more care on the roads. Driving involves a huge amount of trust, responsibility and adherence to the highway code rules and regulations, which everyone should respect every time they drive a vehicle."

Larkfield Crew Manager Peter Colwill added: "My own son has had two accidents and, by his own admission, he was showing off to a girlfriend at the time. He was lucky and was able to escape uninjured. I like to think he has grown up since but I've been to too many crashes where others haven't been so lucky and if this poster makes just one driver think more carefully about their actions then it will have succeeded in its purpose."



Firefighters from across the county have been adding their own personal testimonies

Other firefighters from across the county have been adding their own personal testimonies, including Charing Firefighter Nigel Collins. He has been at the retained station for four years and has attended two fatal car crashes involving teenagers within that time.

"We went to a shout in 2007 where a car had hit a lorry. Two male teenagers had just picked up their girlfriends from school and were out for some fun for the afternoon but one of the boys and one of the girls were killed," he recalls. "The other one I remember was last year and involved two teenage lads in a car one of them had bought just a few days before. We were first on the scene and found it wrapped round a tree. I was the last person to be with that lad as his life ebbed away.

"I have a 22-year-old daughter and an 18-year-old son and I admit that it's different now when I go out to incidents like that. When you work at a retained station, you're often called out within the area you live so there's always a strong chance that you might know someone involved, that one day I might be called to a crash involving my family.

"I've obviously talked to my children about the experiences I've had as a firefighter, but the trouble with teenagers is that they often think they're invincible and that it won't happen to them. They never go out with the intention of causing that much destruction, but it happens.

We go there, clear up the aftermath and our job is done, but as we leave the scene, it's all just starting for the family and friends of those involved."

Sittingbourne Firefighter Jon Clark first joined London Fire Brigade almost 15 years ago but it was during his posting at Canterbury that he remembers a particularly harrowing road traffic collision.

He explains: "It was a young couple, all dressed up and out for the night. She was supposed to have been driving but had a few drinks so he drove instead. It turns out that he'd also been drinking though and they crashed.

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"She was talking at one point but it was clear that she was in a bad way because she'd not been wearing a seatbelt and her head had hit the windscreen. They got her to hospital but she died a few hours later.

"All I could think about was the police officer knocking at her parents' door to tell them what

had happened to their daughter. I've seen lots of injuries and lots of crashes, but being a parent myself, it's not the injuries which disturb me so much as the thought that it could one day happen to me. You think your children are just going out for a good night but then they end up dead. My message to new drivers - especially the boy racers - is think."

Retained Firefighter Karen Rawlings from Teynham has been with KFRS for three years. As mum to a 14-year-old daughter and an 11-year-old son, a car crash in 2008 holds particular resonance for her.

"It was a young woman and her baby. The baby had been thrown from the vehicle but amazingly received just a small bruise. The woman went into cardiac arrest and died a few hours later in hospital," she remembers. "A few days later my son had made a comment about how cool someone was doing a wheel-spin so I told him about that incident and that I had seen a woman die.

"And I remember a chap down the pub saying he was going to drive home after having a few drinks. When I challenged him he said that if he killed himself then at least that wouldn't affect anyone else, but my point is that it does affect others; the firefighters who have to clear him up off the road, the paramedics who try and save him and the police who have to go and tell his family that he's dead.

"When people drive badly, they're a danger to others and they're always going to affect

someone so I say: slow down, better late than dead."