

**Safety Tip of the Month – April 2010**  
**VSI Safety Committee**  
**“Safe Driving – A Forgotten Part of Aquatic Safety”**

Johnny did not show up for swim practice on Tuesday morning. His mother called the pool office to see why he did not come home to get his book pack. Following a frantic search by parents, neighbors, and police, Johnny was discovered in his overturned car near a creek bed, unconscious and with multiple fractures. He was airlifted to the nearest hospital, where he underwent hours of surgery and days recovering within a critical care unit. A month later, Johnny hobbled out of the hospital with the help of his parents and a standby wheelchair. He was fifteen pounds lighter and had sustained short- term memory loss from his severe head injury. But, Johnny was one of the lucky ones ... many youth in similar accidents do not even make it alive to the hospital.

Swimming safety really starts when the athlete leaves the house and should be in effect until the swimmer arrives home. Fatigue is a major deterrent to careful driving. Navigating a new route, severe fog, ice, and driving rain are factors that impede safe driving. Changing songs on a CD player, MP3 player, or radio may lead to a serious accident. Answering cell phone while driving has become a major cause of accidents for many youth. Another is texting while driving - doing this is like playing Russian Roulette. If you need to make a call or text, pull off the road to make the call or send the text, then proceed on to where you were going. In Virginia, it is against the law for an under 18 year old to use a cell phone in any manner while driving. Rushing for fear of being late to practice or to a meet will increase the likelihood of a car accident. Tell your swimmers or adult chauffeurs to obey the speed limits at all times. Frankly stated, “Being late is better than being dead.”

Do you know who your child is riding with in the car, if she / he regularly gets a ride to and from the pool? Does your child routinely snap on the seat belt? Research tells us that if parents do not normally wear seat belts, their children will most likely choose to ignore this essential safety device. Air bags may decrease the magnitude of an injury, but they do not prevent a child or an adult from being ejected from the car if they are not wearing their seat belt.

Many parents literally demand that their children call them, if they are too tired or otherwise feeling unfit to drive home or to another destination. Likewise, children who fear riding with a friend who has reckless driving habits should feel comfortable calling their parents or other friends for alternative transportation. Four wheels and an engine ... it only takes a split second of poor judgment or distraction to lose control of a vehicle, and then lose a life. As a new “dry land exercise,” think about the art and skills involved in driving to and from the pool. Safe driving is one of the greatest gifts we can impart to our aquatic athletes.