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Teen drivers weigh in on changes in driving laws

Back Mountain teens have conflicting opinions on how new laws will affect them.

By SARAH HITE
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New state laws were recently passed involving teen drivers, and the details of the legislation are putting the brakes on common behind-the-wheel habits for

young drivers.

The law, called "Lacey's Law," took effect on Dec. 27. The new rules state for the first six months after teen drivers receive their junior driver's license, they cannot have more than one passenger under the age of 18 who is not an immediate family member in a car unless a parent or guardian is also in the vehicle.

It also makes driving without a seatbelt a primary offense for those under the age of 18.



JOLLEY

Teens in the Back Mountain have conflicting opinions about the new laws, but most are aware of safety concerns and understand what the law is trying to accomplish.

Dana Jolley, of Dallas, knows



STAIR

all about safe driving - after all, her father is Dallas Township Police Chief Robert Jolley.

"I probably know more about driving safely because of that," said the 18-year-old.

Jolley, who received her driv-



ENGLISH

er's license in 2010, said she never had more than one person in the car when she first got behind the wheel because all of her friends had their licenses, too.

"I think it would be an issue



JAYNE

with sports, because you always pile everyone into your car if you have practice or a game," she said.

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PETE G. WILCOX/ THE DALLAS POST

Jack Dodson, Dallas Twp. Emergency Management Coordinator, addresses the Dallas School Board on Monday about following a set of guidelines when implementing an evacuation plan.

Parents demand plan for gas emergency evacuation

By SARAH HITE
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Parents flooded the Dallas School Board meeting Monday ready to confront the lack of communication involving natural gas issues and the process for hiring a new football coach.

The board also discussed high school security after one parent told how her son was beaten by another student and rendered unconscious in November while no one responded to the incident.

Williams Field Services LLC recently completed work on the Springville Gathering Line located about 2,600 feet away from the Dallas School District campus. The line begins in Springville Township, Susquehanna County, and taps into the Transco interstate pipeline, which then sends natural gas to market.

Williams delivered a letter to nearby residents, the Dallas School District and township officials last week about the completion of the Springville line, though many were displeased with the short notice.

Helen Humphreys, senior communications specialist for Williams, said natural gas began flowing through to the Transco line Monday afternoon.

During the meeting, resident Jane Tolomello repeated

"You all can live with the lives of 3,000 children on your heads, but now it's 2,999 - my daughter is no longer your responsibility. I will decide when she evacuates and how she evacuates."

Jane Tolomello
Dallas School District resident

ly asked Superintendent Frank Galicki why parents weren't notified about the expected work last week, as Galicki had received the letter before most residents.

Galicki said at the time, emergency officials had deemed the work to not be a hazard to students.

When word was received on Sunday about continuing work through Monday, Galicki said he immediately took steps to contact all parents within the district with the information.

"You have to understand that we are not the enemy," Galicki told Tolomello. "You think you want us to be the enemy."

Humphreys also announced that she and Williams safety expert Paul Madey would participate in a safety task force with board member Fred Parry, Dallas Township Emergency Management Coordinator Jack Dodson, Dallas Fire Chief Harry Vivian and Dallas Township Police Chief Robert Jolley.

"When did this pipeline start - a year ago?" Tolomello yelled. "Why would you wait until today to bring Williams in (to a school board meeting)?"

Evacuation plan

Parents questioned the board about whether the district has an evacuation plan in place tailored to deal with nat-

ural gas issues.

Galicki said a general plan is in place, but the safety task force will help to further develop the emergency response plan. He said the task force will continue to meet to dis-

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Chief wins appeal to avoid building fence

By SARAH HITE
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Chief Gathering LLC won an appeal to the Dallas Township Zoning Hearing Board Wednesday for the modification of one of the conditions the board stipulated when it approved the company's application for a natural gas metering station last month.

The company received approval Dec. 7 for the construction of a metering facility to be located off Hildebrandt Road about 1,300 feet from the Dallas School District.

The facility would measure the quantity of gas flowing through a not-yet-built Chief gathering line that will tap into the Transco interstate pipeline.

The condition Chief appealed, which was one of seven proposed to the company's project, involved the construction and maintenance of a 6-foot-high fence with barbed wire to be no less than 315 feet at all points surrounding the metering facility.

The condition also stated if Chief could not build the fence, the company would need to design and construct a structure or mechanism that would "reduce the maximum potential impact radius for a large leak."

Jim Scott, senior vice president of the Dallas, Texas-based company, testified the construction of such a fence would interfere with nearby wetlands surrounding the property and abut neighboring property owners' land as well as the Transco line right-of-way.

He said Transco would not allow the construction of a fence

Scott told the board that, instead of fence construction, Chief will install a fast-acting automatic shutdown valve upstream from the metering station and a check valve to prevent the backflow of natural gas downstream from the facility. Resident Diane Dreier asked why these fast-acting valves weren't part of the original plans for the facility, as parents have continuously demanded the utmost safety precautions for the site because of its proximity to the Dallas schools.

on its right-of-way due to safety concerns, but a 6-foot-high fence about 50 feet from all points surrounding the facility with barbed wire around the top would be constructed for safety reasons.

Scott said the proposed 315-foot perimeter fence would not add any element of safety to the site.

Referring to testimony offered in previous hearings by explosives expert Ali Reza, Scott said building a fence would not reduce the impact of a large leak. He explained that because natural gas is lighter than air it would rise as it traveled outward. By the time the gas traveled 315 feet, it would rise to a minimum height of about 220 feet above ground.

Scott said the flammability of the gas would also decrease by the time it rose to that level because natural gas needs to be at a certain concentration for it to combust with an ignition source.

Zoning hearing board member Bob Bayer also said in rendering the decision and conditions, the board did not consider a graph Reza provided with the distance-height ratios that would result in a gas leak.

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stead of fence construction, Chief will install a fast-acting automatic shutdown valve upstream from the metering station and a check valve to prevent the backflow of natural gas downstream from the facility.

Resident Diane Dreier asked why these fast-acting valves weren't part of the original plans for the facility, as parents have continuously demanded the utmost safety precautions for the site because of its proximity to the Dallas schools.

Scott said the difference between valves could be just a few seconds, and he said now the company is working with the manufacturer of the valves to ensure the fastest available valves are part of the site.

"We wouldn't pick the slowest valves on purpose," he said.

Resident Wayne Dottor opposed Chief's request, telling the zoning hearing board "not to back down and appease Chief." He said Scott should have provided written documentation to show Transco would not allow the construction of a fence, rather than relying on verbal communication.

"I can't take their word for it. I have to take worst-case scenario

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Friendly's has closed

Friendly's Restaurant, located at the intersection of routes 309 and 415, closed its doors on Sunday, Jan. 8 after 26 years in business and will not reopen.

Maura Tobias, a Friendly's spokesperson, attributes the closure to the Massachusetts-based company's filing for Chapter 11 last October and its inability to negotiate lease rates with the landlord.

With the closure, about 20 employees lost their jobs and several community organizations, including the Back Mountain Memorial Library and Dallas Rotary Club, lost an important fundraising outlet.

"We regret that this decision has become necessary, and we appreciate the hard work and dedication of the Friendly's employees and intend to accommo-

date as many as possible at nearby operating restaurants, where available," said Tobias.

The company's Family Fun Nights, a fundraising technique in which a portion of the restaurant's proceeds during a period of time would be donated to an organization, benefitted several local groups.

"It was a fun thing because people came to eat there, and they often ran into people they knew," said Martha Butler, director of the library. "Everyone was there for a common cause, which made for a nice camaraderie."

Dallas Borough Mayor Tim Carroll, who ate at the popular franchise about twice a week, said it's difficult to see any business close its doors but expects the location to have another ten-



CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK/ FOR THE DALLAS POST

A sign on the door of Friendly's restaurant in Dallas thanks customers for their patronage. Friendly's has declared bankruptcy and the store at the intersection of Routes 309 and 415 has closed after 26 years of serving the Back Mountain.

ant soon.

"I think it means someone else was interested in the property," he said. "I don't think it will be empty for long."

A Friendly's Restaurant in

South Abington Township in Lackawanna County also closed Sunday. Friendly's has locations in Wilkes-Barre, Dunmore and Hazle Township.

- Sarah Hite



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