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Course Number

15 April 2019

Senior speech: Safety in high school parking lots

In the United States, nearly 20% of all motor vehicle accidents are occurring at parking lots. As the number of vehicles on the road continue to grow, parking lots are now increasingly being seen as danger zones owing to a number of factors. Drivers are particularly known to be either overly relaxed or overly aggressive within parking lots, while the presence of pedestrians, reduced sightlines and blind spots, distracted drivers and frequent turning all contribute to making parking lots unsafe. Yet, safety at parking lots remains an afterthought to most people. According to the National Highway Safety Administration, an average of nearly 50 children per week across the nation receive injuries near a parking lot (NHTSA). These risk factors put students that drive and use school parking lots under high risk. A closer look at research over the issue reveals creating one-way entries and exits along with traffic control officers as a key solution to the impending problem

One of the main problems in parking lots that create a safety hazard for drivers and pedestrians is distraction and recklessness. Students are either distracted by their search for a perfect spot, or due to blind zones that adjacent vehicles create, or generally being prone to use of social media, texting, or phone calls more in parking lots. Congestion is a major cause of the hassle as a bulk of cars have to enter and exit with a short time period, which in turn, tends to create recklessness and thus fender-benders are more likely to occur. Moreover, to avoid the after-school rush, student drivers tend to sprint to their cars hoping to drive as further away from school premises as possible to be able to avoid or cut off endless lines of parents. Unsurprisingly, poll results conducted at various high schools in 2016 revealed that nearly 15% of students had been hit by another car in the parking lot with 75% of them not knowing who hit them (Sanders).

Furthermore, the increasing presence of vehicles is a result of public attitudes towards school buses, the urban term "loser cruiser" being indicative of that, along with increasing enrollment and expansion of school buildings to accommodate them. This shrinks space at the parking lot and leads to a competition for space. The safety hazard comes from driver habits especially at peak hours who often chase individuals heading for their vehicles, revolve around the parking lot. Consequently, the stress, frustration and expense of parking at the campus contributes to the recklessness and hassle that exists. Moreover, the parking lot becomes a spot for talking, texting, or searching for friends and family. Within the congestion, vehicle speed is another issue that threatens the safety of pedestrians and other drivers since it is very difficult to police such zones and issue speed tickets (Bush). As a result, parking lots have become substantially more unsafe for people and their vehicles, and require high school boards and administration to churn out effective solutions to address these safety hazards.

To solve some of the major issues students, teachers, and parents currently face, a careful assessment of high school parking lots is needed that can ensure a reasonable traffic flow while enhancing pedestrian safety, and flow of traffic at bordering roads. One of the best ways to reduce the congestion is to issue parking permits to high school students that hold a valid driver's license, thereby validating every vehicle that enters and exits the parking space. The permits will help reduce unauthorized parking and improve management of the parking space, thereby reducing the onset of risk-factors that create safety hazards. In this regard, designating parking officers at peak hours can not only help monitor authorized vehicle in-flow but also improve the parking lots’ overall security. Findings from a study on school safety agree that designating a higher number of dedicated staff at parking lots, especially at peak hours such as 20 minutes after school can significantly reduce the likelihood of injuries or violent events occurring at the place (Astor, Meyer and Benbenishty).

Although a range of solutions are proposed, however, one of the most effective safety intervention in this regard is to minimize the sources of driver distraction along with reducing their speed. Speed bumps are not a proven way to reduce vehicular speed and may create further hazards to pedestrians by potentially causing already-distracted drivers to lose the vehicle’s control. However, closely placed rumble strips near the pedestrian walkways are an effective solution as they give a sense of higher acceleration to the driver through the sound they produce, thereby causing them unconsciously to reduce speed. Similarly, crosswalks should be raised to force vehicles to slow down. Integrating technology such as digital displays and radar at parking lot spaces has proven to work for a few schools by not only showing drivers their speed but to catch repeat offenders and subsequently, punish them making them park at a much farther location (Bush).

Another proven intervention to mitigate the problem is to create one-way isles in order to reduce the number of oncoming vehicles and to make angled parking for vehicles easier without considering the oncoming traffic. This can reduce the maneuvering difficulty for drivers and help them park in tight parking places more easily and thereby reduce risks. Along with that, the parking lot has to be designed to minimize pedestrian distances and ensure that lane striping is adequately done to direct and guide the flow of traffic and thus improve overall safety.

To conclude, a number of solutions to mitigate the safety hazards at high school parking lots exist; however, it is important for students to remember that whether a drastic solution to the parking problem is present or not, they have to exercise greater caution especially near parking lots, pay attention and drive slow in order to ensure that safety of everyone in the area.

# Works Cited

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