

Save a Life Program offers unique experience to Sailors

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The "Save a Life Tour" made a stop at NAS Jacksonville Jan. 24-25. The program travels across the nation to educate young adults about the dangers of drunk driving. Sailors were able to participate in a non-traditional opportunity to experience a state-of-the-art, interactive driving experience that simulates driving under the influence of alcohol.

"If you can't do this while you are sober, you definitely can't do this when you have been drinking," said Brian Beldyga, co-founder of the "Save a Life Tour." "We're here to show people new angles on drinking and driving and how alcohol affects reaction times, motor skills, how you can develop tunnel vision. We show all the hidden dangers. We act as the drunk friend in the front seat to give drivers the full effect.

Everything is like driving a real car, so after giving them all this information, they can't say the machine is making them make errors." This virtual reality machine simulates what it would be like in the front seat of a Ford Taurus after drinking. Since people metabolize alcohol at a different rate, the simulator has 57 individual sensors in the seating area that determine the user's height and weight to provide accurate effects. The interactive environment gives a 485-degree field of vision and is programmed to maneuver like a driver under the influence would, with increasing levels of impairment as the experience goes on. The user experiences unique challenges such as random traffic patterns, varying weather conditions and changes in route.

After participating in the simulation, AM3 Joshua Stiefel of VS-22 said, "It was certainly an eye-opening experience and showed me what not to do while driving down the road. It was a lot harder than I thought it would be. It seemed like I was going in slow motion and had to wait for things to happen and things just didn't go the way I wanted them to."

"I thought the simulator was pretty educational. You don't realize what you are doing when you go through it. You think you can just drive like you do normally do and you just have to watch out for other vehicles, but I couldn't even watch for obstacles because I was so focused on how I was driving so I didn't see anything," added AE3 Casey Myers of VP-16. "It was pretty stressful. The instructor was yelling and I was so confused.



This activity forces Sailors to recognize the disastrous effects of drinking and driving. As a grim reminder of the potential fate of not only drunk drivers, but those who have been victims, there was an open casket on display as well as somber posters next to the simulator. "No matter what, no matter how many lines you hear, be a friend, take the keys," stated Beldyga.

AE3 Casey Myers of VP-16 takes the wheel of the Save A Life simulator as Tour Associate Patrick Ralston of The National Save A Life Tour, critiques her driving techniques.



Tour Associate Patrick Ralston of The National Save A Life Tour, briefs AM3 Joshua Stiefel of VS-22, on how he did after test driving the Save A Life simulator at Hangar 116 Jan. 24. Photos by Kaylee LaRocque