

CT firm seeks to market safe-driving product

By Gregory Seay

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A Stamford patent agent and a Massachusetts actuary have paired to seek a patent on an insurance product aimed at promoting safety among teen motorists.

Mark Nowotarski, president of Markets, Patents & Alliances LLC, said today the U.S. Patent Office could rule by late June on their patent application (No. 20090063201) filed last October for the SoberTeen Driving Insurance product.

Nowotarski said he teamed with auto insurance actuary Donald Bashline to devise a product that relies on so-called black boxes already in use in some late-model automobiles to monitor braking force, speed and proximity to other vehicles.

The programmable device can be used to detect such risky driving behaviors as speeding, cellphone use, and driving while drunk, drowsy or emotionally impaired, Nowotarski said. Information collected by the boxes would give insurers, parents and others details about motorists' driving habits.

The inventors look to sell or license their product to auto insurers, who in turn could market it as a safe-driving package with discounts of 10 percent to 30 percent to teen and other drivers who install the black box, said Nowotarski, a former research and development engineer for Danbury-based Praxair.

Nowotarski said he has had discussions with several unnamed insurers about SoberTeen.

The pair also have taken the unusual step of opening up their invention for review to the general patent community of lawyers, technical experts and educators via PeerToPatent.org.

Nowotarski said he is encouraged by feedback from reviewers' posts on the site. A group of business students at Kent State University in Ohio recently reviewed the concept as part of a class project, Nowotarski said.

"They're all saying it's new," he said.

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