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Katie's Law could help curb accidents with elderly drivers

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By: Russell Wilde

A Randall's grocery store in West Austin is back open after an [elderly woman accidentally hit the gas pedal instead of the brakes and crashed into the building](#).

The incident raises the question of elderly drivers and whether they should face more restrictions with their driver's license.

"We can't pretend that the body's natural aging process doesn't take place. The body, with the natural passage of time, starts breaking down at some points. People may be in great shape at 90; others may not be in great shape at age 60," Rafael Ayuso of AARP said.

This year, the Texas Legislature took steps to try to prevent accidents involving elderly drivers by passing [Katie's Law](#). It calls for drivers 79 and older to renew their license in person and pass a vision test. Licenses for drivers 85 and older will expire after two years and the Department of Public Safety may require a written or driving test. [HB 84](#) becomes effective on Sept. 1, 2007.

Texas law requires older drivers to have their licenses renewed every six years.

Katie's Law is named for 17-year-old Katie Bolka, who was killed in 2006 by a 90-year-old driver who ran a red light.

The AARP wants all drivers to be safe, but they say losing abilities with age is a fact of life. Insurance companies report that drivers age 80 and above are often high risk drivers as their sight and responsiveness deteriorate.

The AARP offers classes and online advice to teach older drivers to look for signs that its time to turn in the keys.

Experts also say it's important for family members to be aware of their older relatives' driving abilities. The best way to do that is to ride with them.

Protests force D.C. to scrap re-testing for older drivers

Retired World Bank employee Giuseppe Morra has been driving the streets of Washington for more than three decades, during which time he's had only one minor accident.

So, when the District of Columbia tried to make the 80-year-old take a road test and a written test at license renewal time, he balked.

And plenty of others did, too, forcing Mayor Adrian Fenty to suspend the testing, except in cases where the motor vehicle department has specific concerns.

Only two states re-test older drivers: New Hampshire and Illinois, despite a number of spectacular fatal accidents involving older drivers.

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