



# What is Sunshine Week?

Sunshine Week is a national initiative to promote dialogue about the importance of open government and freedom of information. Participants include news media, civic groups, libraries, nonprofits, schools and all others interested in the public's right to know. Sunshine Week seeks to enlighten and empower people to play an active role in their government at all levels, and to give them access to information that makes their lives better and their communities stronger.

## What do we mean by Cyber Sunshine?

This year the New York News Publishers Association Newspaper in Education Program has decided to focus on “Cyber Sunshine” – the ability of government to embrace the use of technology to make relevant documents readily and easily accessible to the public. To some extent, “Cyber Sunshine” already exists. Many reports are posted online and can be accessed by the public. However, compared to the amount of data collected by state and local government it's fair to say we're living in a land that's still mostly-cloudy.

Over the next several days this newspaper will run a series of features highlighting just a few of the websites with reports and other data that we think might be of interest to students and the general public. The topics include:

- **What is “E-Government”?** – A brief summary of our “Cyber Sunshine” focus
- **Vehicle Safety** – Highway Safety Data
- **Food Safety** – Restaurant Inspection Reports
- **School Safety** – Violence and Disruptive Incident Reports

Remember, whether you specifically need to ask for the information or if the documents are already posted online –

**It's Your Right to Know!**

This is one of a series of eight Newspaper In Education features created to educate and celebrate Sunshine Week 2013.



# What is “E-Government”?

Not long ago, the term “E-Government” meant “electronic” government and referred to the use of new technologies to increase government transparency. This involved the use of e-mail and other electronic means to increase the speed and ease of communication between the public and government.

**Proactive Disclosure** - the release of relevant information and reports through agency websites and other techniques, without the need for any specific request.

**Open Data** - information made available in a digital format that can be retrieved, downloaded, indexed, searched and used with commonly available software and web search applications.

The next phase of “E-Government” includes the proactive use of modern technologies to make the vast amounts of valuable government-held information more widely available, and to facilitate its ready use by policy makers and the public alike. In other words, government should not wait for members of the public to request information to “pull” it but rather, government should “push” information to the public, proactively disclosing information in an open data or free file format.

## It’s Your Right to Know!

**Student Assessment:** What information did you learn was readily available online from your local or state government? Complete this statement: This information is important to the general public because....

**Newspaper Activity:** Select an article about local or state government in your newspaper (print or electronic). Is there something about a specific topic you’d like to know more about? Go to the city, town or state agency’s website and investigate what data may already be available to the public.



# How Safe is our Driving?

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 11% of all drivers under the age of 20 involved in fatal crashes were reported as distracted at the time of the crash. This age group has the largest proportion of drivers who were distracted. Text messaging creates a crash risk 23 times worse than driving while not distracted. New York State law prohibits the use of hand held mobile devices and texting for all drivers.

Ever wonder how many accidents are caused by young drivers (16 to 20 year olds) in your area? It is actually easy to find out. You can access a lot of detailed information about vehicle accidents on New York State's online Highway Safety Data Page at [www.safeny.ny.gov/hsdata.htm](http://www.safeny.ny.gov/hsdata.htm).

Some of the data is broken down by county and other reports can be found for specific age groups, especially younger drivers. So, what's the biggest contributing human factor for fatality and personal injury crashes for young drivers in New York State? Yup, you guessed it – driver inattention or distraction!

Assessment: Why do you think the information about traffic accidents/safety is important to the public?

## **Newspaper Activity:**

Find an article in a recent edition of the local newspaper (print or online) about an automobile accident involving a young driver. Go online and review the information in the New York State Fact Sheet: Crashes Involving Young Drivers Ages 16-20 at [www.safeny.ny.gov/10data/YoungDrivers2006-10.pdf](http://www.safeny.ny.gov/10data/YoungDrivers2006-10.pdf). Compare and contrast this incident with the available data?

**Student Assessment:** Why do you think the information about traffic accidents/safety is important to the public?

## **It's Your Right to Know!**



# How Safe is our Food?

Food service establishments throughout the state undergo surprise inspections. Inspectors check for compliance in food handling, food temperature, personal hygiene and vermin control. Inspection results are shared with the NYS Department of Health. This information includes the names and location of food service establishments and the violations that were found at the time of inspection.

Thinking about a trip into New York City? If you're planning to eat out while you're there, you can easily check the latest inspection results of the restaurant before you go in to order. On NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene website ([www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/services/restaurant-inspection.shtml](http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/services/restaurant-inspection.shtml)) you'll find health inspection results for each of New York City's 24,000 restaurants.

This restaurant inspection link is only one very small part of NYS Department of Health's METRIX project. METRIX stands for Maximizing Essential Tools for Research Innovation and eXcellence and this online resource has additional links to a wide variety of datasets on different aspects of health care including but not limited to: information about cancer, patient safety, obesity, and vital statistics. Why not see for yourself? Investigate what METRIX has available online at <https://apps.nyhealth.gov/METRIX/main.action>.

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### Student Assessment:

Complete this statement. The health information provided by METRIX is important to the public because...

### Newspaper Activity:

Look through your local newspaper (print or online) for restaurant reviews. Select one that's of interest to you and then go to [METRIX](#) and see if you can find the most recent health inspection data for that establishment. Keeping in mind that inspections are a 'snapshot' in time and are not always reflective of the day-to-day operations and overall condition of an establishment, would you eat there? Why or why not?



# How Safe are our Schools?

When parents send their children to school, they assume and want to be assured that their children are in a safe place to learn. Federal law requires each state to determine annually which public elementary and secondary schools are “persistently dangerous.”

Each state may set its own criteria to assess and compare levels of violence across schools. New York bases its “persistently dangerous” determinations on two years’ worth of Violent and Disruptive Incident Reports (VADIR) data. Each school district is required to submit VADIR data for each school building each year.

Would you like to know the number and type of reportable disruptions that occurred at your school? Was your school determined to be “persistently dangerous”? That information is readily available on New York State Department of Education’s Information and Reporting Services website at [www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/vadir/vadir-reporting.html](http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/vadir/vadir-reporting.html).

Schools designated as “persistently dangerous” must submit to State Ed an Incident Reduction Plan explaining the steps to be taken to increase school safety.

According to information found on the New York State Center for School Safety’s website, district-wide school safety plans are public and must include, among other things, policies and procedures for:

- contacting law enforcement in the event of an emergency;
- contacting parents, guardians or persons in parental relation to students in the event of an emergency or an early dismissal;
- the use of school safety officers and/or security devices or procedures, as appropriate;
- the identification of appropriate responses to emergencies; and
- responding to acts of violence and implied or direct threats of violence by students, faculty, staff or anyone else in the school building.

**Student Assessment:** Why is the safety data provided by NYS Department of Education important to the public?

**Newspaper Activity:** Look through your local newspaper (print or online) for article involving local school safety. Can you identify which category of a VADIR report this incident would fall under?

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