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California Announces Statewide Crackdown on Handheld Cell Use Behind the Wheel

April is Distracted Driving Awareness Month – “It’s Not Worth It!”

Sacramento, CA – In an effort to save lives and eliminate dangerous behind-the-wheel distractions like talking, texting, or browsing on a cell phone, the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS), California Highway Patrol (CHP), and more than 200 law enforcement agencies across the state today announced high visibility enforcement operations during April’s National Distracted Driving Awareness Month.

“Catastrophic crashes can happen in a split second,” said Brian Kelly, Secretary of the California State Transportation Agency. “No text or phone call is worth that risk.”

Four dates, April 3, 8, 17, and 22, have been earmarked for special statewide enforcement for all the allied law enforcement agencies. Individual agencies will be looking for mobile device offenders in their areas on additional days throughout the month. The increased enforcement aims to persuade drivers to recognize the dangers of distracted driving and reduce the number of people impacted by this perilous behavior. The “*It’s Not Worth It!*” theme emphasizes that a phone call or text isn’t worth a hefty fine or a collision.

“Distracted driving has become a dangerous epidemic nationwide and we want to do everything we can to stop it here and now,” said OTS Acting Director Russia Chavis. “Law enforcement agencies will be out in full force to help remind drivers to put down their cell phones and maintain their focus on the roads. By working together, we can eliminate crashes and the senseless loss of lives of that can result from distracted driving.”

In recent years, hundreds have been killed and thousands seriously injured in California as a result of collisions that involved at least one driver who was distracted. Nationally, an estimated 3,328 people died and 421,000 people were injured in motor vehicle crashes involving a distracted driver in 2012. Any activity that diverts the driver’s attention away from the primary task of driving is distracting, but the recent dramatic rise in cell phone use has greatly increased the number of collisions.

“Any non-driving activity a driver engages in behind the wheel is a potential distraction and increases their risk of being involved in a collision,” said CHP Commissioner Joe Farrow. “Through education and enforcement, law enforcement is working to change this dangerous and potentially life-threatening behavior.”

According to research, sending or receiving a text takes a driver's eyes from the road for an average of 4.6 seconds. Even a three second glance at freeway speeds means a driver has traveled the distance of a football field.

In 2013, the California Department of Motor Vehicles reported over 426,000 handheld cell phone and texting convictions, with more than 57,000 tickets issued in April alone. The CHP and statewide law enforcement agencies are committed to ensuring our streets are safe by ticketing anyone found driving while distracted. The ticket cost for a first time texting or hand-held cell phone violation is about \$162, with subsequent tickets costing about \$282.

To avoid falling victim to distracted driving behaviors, OTS and the CHP are providing drivers with the following tips that can be implemented by any motorist:

- Turn off your phone or put it on silent mode, then put it out of reach while driving
- Record an outgoing message on your phone that tells callers you're driving and will get back to them when you're off the road
- Adjust controls and set your song playlist before you set out on the road
- If it's urgent, pull over in a safe place to place a call
- Focus on driving, and avoid eating, drinking, reading, grooming, smoking, and any other activity that takes your mind and eyes off the road

The California Office of Traffic Safety, California Highway Patrol, Caltrans and Department of Motor Vehicles remind you to drive safely not only during April's Distracted Driving Awareness Month, but every day throughout the year. Get more distracted driving information at www.distraction.gov, www.ots.ca.gov, www.chp.ca.gov and teen information at www.impactteendrivers.org.



Impact Teen Drivers reminds parents, teens, and all drivers that **April 2 – 8 is California Teen Safe Driving Week**, a week dedicated to empowering teens to make meaningful behavioral changes in their own driving habits, as well as to promote safe driving in their community. <http://impactteendrivers.org/>

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