



it's  
**NOT**  
worth  
it!



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## Cell Phone Usage Rate and Distracted Driving Month Tickets Down

(Sacramento, CA) – More than 55,000 drivers were ticketed for handheld cell phone talking or texting during April's Distracted Driving Awareness Month, according to the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) and the California Highway Patrol (CHP). The citations written by officers from 103 CHP local offices as well as nearly 230 local law enforcement agencies across the state dropped by 5 percent from the over 58,000 written in 2013. The April total is still much higher than the average month, when about 33,000 cell phone violation convictions are seen.

The Office of Traffic Safety also announced that the percentage of drivers actively using cell phones at any one time across the state dropped to its lowest point since counting began in 2011. Those observed either manipulating or talking on a cell phone, handheld or hands free, dropped from 7.4 percent in 2013 to 6.6 percent in 2014. The information was contained in a cell phone observational survey conducted in March by OTS through the UC Berkeley Safe Transportation Research and Education Center. The figures are considered the lowest end probable, due to the inherent difficulty in observing the more subtle cell phone behaviors, especially texting and hands free talking.

"If the number of people using cell phones while driving is truly on the decline, then the public really is getting the message," said OTS Director Rhonda Craft. "But we still must convince those who think that the odds won't catch up to them, or who think that new technology like in-dash communication systems are appreciably safer."

Bucking the downward trend of cell phone violations were those handed out in April for other types of distracted driving – eating, grooming, reading, or other distracting behaviors. The number of citations for those violations more than doubled to over 7,000. Cell phone citations in general have been dropping yearly from the high in 2011 of over 476,000 to just over 426,000 in 2013. The only category still increasing is for texting, which began with 2,800 in 2009 and hit over 27,000 last year.

"It only takes a split second of inattention to change your life or injure or kill others," said CHP Commissioner Joe Farrow. "Through education and enforcement campaigns like the statewide effort this past April, we are hoping to keep the public safe by encouraging drivers to stay focused on the road and avoid all distractions while behind the wheel."

(more)

Law enforcement agencies from across the state joined in four coordinated high visibility enforcement efforts during April. Many continued the effort throughout the entire month. In addition to lower numbers of drivers breaking the laws, the lower number of citations may also be due to the 11 percent fewer number of local agencies that were able to take part in special enforcement effort.

The campaign continued to make drivers and the public aware of the dangers of distracted driving through press events where members of the media drove coned courses while texting, traveling exhibits showing how each individual driver may be contributing to the problem, TV commercials featuring brainless zombies texting, and internet and social media engagements. Caltrans programmed many of their changeable message signs over highways with texting and talking messages stressing the campaign's *"It's Not Worth It!"* theme.

Those ticketed for violating the cell phone laws will face costs of \$162 for the first offense and \$285 for subsequent offenses. Other violations for actions that can be classified as distracted driving can range even higher. All the highly publicized enforcement and public awareness campaigns have one goal in mind – to eliminate the dangers posed by distracted driving. Nationally, an estimated 3,328 people died and 421,000 people were injured in motor vehicle crashes involving a distracted driver in 2012.

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