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**DRIVE SMART: PREVENT DISTRACTED DRIVING BY MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICES**

*Extra Distracted Driving Enforcement on Minnesota Roads June 1-14*

Northfield, Minn. — Drivers should know by now that holding and using a phone while behind the wheel is not only distracting, it’s illegal in Minnesota and could lead to a crash. Drivers also need to understand that there are distractions all around them beyond their phones. While distractions such as eating, checking your makeup, turning around to talk to a child or turning the radio channel are not illegal, they are behaviors that could also lead to a crash.

Driving smart and focusing 100 percent of your attention on the road can help avoid tragedy for everyone sharing the road. Distracted driving-related crashes claim an average of 46 lives each year, causing a lifetime of grief and pain for the families left behind and an untold story of what could have been.

To help increase awareness and change dangerous behaviors, Minnesota law enforcement agencies will begin a two-week distracted driving enforcement wave starting June 1. The Northfield Police Department will take part in extra enforcement along with more than 300 law enforcement agencies across Minnesota. The distracted driving campaign that runs through June 14 is coordinated by the Minnesota Department of Public Safety Office of Traffic Safety (DPS-OTS).

“Getting ready to leave a few minutes earlier can help you avoid many distractions that take place in the car,” said Sergeant Kevin Tussing. “Giving yourself more time helps you get ready at home, not in the car. It allows you to eat and not risk dropping food on your lap, which could take your eyes off the road. It allows you to set your radio, streaming music or GPS before you start driving. You get the picture. All these activities behind the wheel are behaviors that could lead to a crash. You don’t want to be that person who takes another life or your own. Drive smart by always paying attention behind the wheel.”

**Distracted Driving is Dangerous Driving**

- More than 50,000 crashes were distracted driving-related from 2015-2019 contributing to one in seven crashes in Minnesota.
- In 2019, distracted driving contributed to 3,279 injuries and 32 deaths.
- Distracted driving contributes to an average of 40 deaths and 195 life-changing injuries a year (2015 – 2019).

<b>Distracted Driving</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Fatalities</b>	72	41	24	29	32	*198
<b>Serious Injuries</b>	173	254	218	179	149	*973

## **Hands-Free is the Law**

Hands-free cell phone use became law on Aug. 1, 2019 in Minnesota. That means drivers can no longer hold their phone in their hand. Accessing or posting on social media, streaming videos, checking that box score or Googling information on a device while driving are all still against the law in Minnesota, even in hands-free mode.

During the first seven months of the [hands-free law](#), 13,830 drivers were cited for failing to comply with the law.

## **Distracted Driving Consequences**

- **HANDS-FREE CELL PHONE LAW:** The new law allows a driver to use their cell phone to make calls, text, listen to music or podcasts and get directions, but only by voice commands or single-touch activation without holding the phone. Remember, hands-free is not necessarily distraction-free.
  - \$100 or more including court fees for a first offense.
  - \$300 or more including court fees for a second and/or subsequent offense.
- If you injure or kill someone while violating the hands-free law, you can face a felony charge of criminal vehicular operation or homicide.

## **Drive Smart and Join Minnesotans Driving Distracted-Free**

- Cell phones — Park the phone by putting it down, turning it off, placing it out of reach or going hands-free.
- Music and other controls — Pre-program radio stations and arrange music in an easy-to-access spot. Adjust mirrors and ventilation before traveling.
- Navigation — Map out the destination and enter the GPS route in advance.
- Eating and drinking — Avoid messy foods and secure drinks.
- Children — Teach children the importance of good behavior in a vehicle and model proper driving behavior.
- Passengers — **Speak up** to stop drivers from distracted driving behavior and offer to help with anything that takes the driver's attention off the road.

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