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Distracted Driving Remains a Danger

New York, April 7, 2020 -- The month of April is traditionally designated Distracted Driving Month to call attention to behavior that claims nearly 3,000 lives every year. In the midst of the global coronavirus pandemic, our collective minds understandably may not be on driving safety, except for those essential workers who must drive. But as most people now shelter in place, many of us still do drive, even if only locally to the grocery store. During that limited amount of driving, we still run the risk of being in a crash, especially as a result of driving while distracted.

"Distraction can be caused by many seemingly harmless things other than texting or talking on a cell phone," said Michelle Anderson, Director of Operations at The National Road Safety Foundation (NRSF), a non-profit group that promotes safe driving behavior. "Something as seemingly harmless as tuning the radio can be a dangerous distraction that takes a driver's mind off the road, with potentially deadly results."

Texting or talking, even with a hands-free device, creates a cognitive distraction, taking concentration off the main task at hand --- driving. Texting takes the driver's eyes off the road for at least three or four seconds, which means at highway speeds you are driving blind for the length of a football field. Studies show that drivers who use hand-held devices are four times as likely to get into crashes serious enough to cause injuries. Using a cell phone while driving, whether it's hand-held or hands-free, impairs a driver's reaction time as much as having a blood alcohol concentration at the legal limit of .08 percent.

A recent study by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety found that 52 percent of respondents admitted to talking on a handheld cell phone while driving during the previous 30 days. More than 40 percent said they had read a text or email while behind the wheel and 32 percent said they had sent a text or email.

“Clearly, people’s actions are not in step with the reality of distraction,” said NRSF’s Michelle Anderson. “A big part of the solution is simply to be aware of what causes distraction. That’s why the NRSF encourages drivers to keep their eyes on the road, hands on the wheel and their mind on driving.”

In addition to use of cell phones and texting, common distractions include buckling seatbelts and adjusting seats and mirrors while driving, using a GPS device, tuning the radio , CD or iPod, applying makeup, eating or drinking, reaching for personal belongings or even talking with fellow passengers.

The National Road Safety Foundation has brief videos about distracted driving that can be viewed or downloaded at no charge from <http://www.nrsf.org/programs/distracted-driving>. The site also has a downloadable self-assessment quiz titled “Am I Distracted?” that points out common behaviors that cause distraction while driving.

The National Road Safety Foundation, Inc., a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization founded nearly 60 years ago, produces traffic safety programs on distracted driving, speed and aggression, impaired driving, drowsy driving, driver proficiency, pedestrian safety and a host of other safety issues. It distributes the programs free of charge to schools, police and traffic safety advocates, community groups and individuals. It also sponsors contests to engage teens in promoting safe driving to their peers and in their communities. For more information or to download free programs, visit www.nrsf.org or www.teenlane.org and “Like” us on Facebook.

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