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**TEENS AT GREATEST RISK FOR CAR CRASHES;  
POLICE REMIND THEM TO KEEP HANDS ON THE WHEEL,  
THUMBS OFF CELLPHONE KEY PAD**

***National Teen Driver Safety Week is October 17-24***

NEW YORK, Oct. 12, 2010 – National Teen Driver Safety Week, Oct. 17 – 24, this year is putting the focus on what U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood calls "a national epidemic" – teens being killed and injured in traffic crashes caused by texting and cellphone use while driving.

All types of electronic devices, which continue to grow in popularity, are vying for the attention of young drivers over the act of driving itself.

"Far too often, the devices are winning, and our kids are losing," says Tom Louizou, Regional Administrator New York/New Jersey/Pennsylvania) for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), which coordinates the Tri-State Traffic Safety Partners, a coalition of traffic safety and other agencies in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut.

According to NHTSA, more than 3,750 teens ages 15 through 19 died in automobile crashes of all types in 2009, and almost 660, or 18 percent, of those were killed in crashes involving some form of distracted driving.

While distracted driving comes in many forms, from texting and talking on a cell phone, to eating and playing with a radio, CD player, or MP3 device, the result too often is tragic. In 2008, that tragedy was played out nearly 800 times on America's highways—that's the number of people killed in crashes that involved a distracted teen driver.

While no one is exempt from driving distractions offered by the electronic gizmos they are bringing with them into their vehicles, teens seem to be particularly susceptible to the siren call of texting. A study by the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project reported that nearly half of the teens interviewed reported that they had been in a vehicle while the driver texted. One in three teens told Pew researchers that they had texted while driving.

There is some good news, Louizou notes. Teen driving deaths and involvement in fatal crashes have been declining over the last decade. In 2008, according to figures from NHTSA, 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in fatal crashes dropped 27 percent compared to 1998. Driver fatalities for this age group also dropped by 20 percent over the same 10-year period.

While it is impossible to pinpoint a single reason for these declines, youth driving programs like Graduated Driver Licensing are certainly having a profound and positive effect on saving young lives on the highways. Also, NHTSA anticipates that anti-texting laws and strong police enforcement may also contribute to helping save teen lives. In the first six months of 2010, no fewer than 30 States have passed legislation outlawing texting while driving.

In addition, awareness programs like National Teen Driver Safety Week are helping to educate both parents and teens alike about this important safety issue nationwide.

"It is important that teens realize that focusing on the road is the priority when they're driving," Louizou says. "When you're behind the wheel a 3,000-pound vehicle, it's not the time or place for multi-tasking." Louizou adds that it's critical that parents and other adults set a good example by following the same rules of not texting or talking on the cellphone while driving.

For more information about teen driving safety, please visit [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov); [www.distraction.gov](http://www.distraction.gov); and [www.trafficsafetymarketing.gov](http://www.trafficsafetymarketing.gov).

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