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April is National Distracted Driving Awareness Month

DRIVER DISTRACTION REMAINS A GROWING FACTOR IN TRAFFIC CRASHES

**Despite laws and publicity, too many continue to drive distracted;
Distraction a major risk for teen drivers**

NEW YORK, March 29, 2021 -- April is National Distracted Driving Awareness month, and the latest statistics for traffic fatalities show a troubling trend. The number of people killed on U.S. roads and highways last year is the highest it's been in 13 years – 42,060, according to new estimates from the National Safety Council.

Driver distraction is a factor in a growing percentage of those fatalities. More than 3,100 people died in distraction-related crashes in 2019 – up 10 percent over the previous year. Many experts believe the actual numbers are even higher than officially reported, with distraction a factor in as many as 25 percent of all crashes. Research shows that more than a third of all U.S. drivers admitted to talking or texting while behind the wheel.

“Talking and texting on cell phones, while the most talked-about cause of driver distraction, is not the only thing that can distract a driver,” said Michelle Anderson, Director of Operations at The National Road Safety Foundation, a non-profit group that promotes safe driving behavior. “Seemingly harmless things like tuning the radio, adjusting the GPS, eating or drinking can take a driver’s mind off the road, with potentially deadly results. Even talking to other passengers can be a dangerous distraction. Part of the solution is simply becoming aware of what creates driver distraction and remembering that drivers must always keep their hands on the wheel, eyes on the road and their mind on the task of driving.”

States nationwide have responded with laws outlawing cell phone use by drivers. Forty-eight states and the District of Columbia ban texting while driving, and 25 states and D.C. have laws banning use of hand-held phones while driving. Police mount ongoing campaigns to catch and arrest distracted drivers, and many safety groups, including The National Road Safety

Foundation, have created resources to call attention to the issue and to make distracted driving as socially unacceptable as drunk driving has become.

The risk of distraction is especially high for teen drivers. Nine percent of drivers ages 15 to 19 involved in 2019 fatal crashes were reported as distracted.

“It’s important that parents talk with their teen drivers about distraction,” Anderson said. She suggests they sign, with their teens, a mutual pledge not to text or talk on the phone while driving. Parents can also use technology to help stem the problem, with apps that prevent calls while a car is in motion and others that enable parents to track and monitor driver behavior.

Speaking up is another way to help. Passengers are encouraged to say something if the driver takes or makes a call or responds to a text. Parents should also refrain from using their phones while driving, as well as obeying speed limits and traffic signals. “Young people pattern their behavior on what they see their parents and other adults do, so it’s up to us to set the right example,” said Anderson.

As part of Distracted Driving Awareness Month, state and local police will partner with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration for the annual “U Drive. U Text. You Pay” campaign to aggressively enforce distracted driving laws.

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

The National Road Safety Foundation, Inc. (NRSF) is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit charitable organization that for nearly 60 years has been dedicated to reducing crashes, deaths and injuries on our nation’s highways by promoting safe driving habits through greater public awareness.

NRSF produces documentaries, educational programs and public service campaigns for broadcast and for use in safety, educational and enforcement programs by police, teachers, traffic safety agencies, healthcare professionals, youth advocacy groups and other grass-roots related agencies, as well as federal, state and local government agencies. NRSF programs, which are free, deal with distracted driving, speed and aggression, impaired driving, drowsy driving, driver proficiency and pedestrian safety. The Foundation also works with youth advocacy groups and sponsors contests to engage teens in promoting safe driving to their peers and in their communities. For information or to download free programs, visit www.nrsf.org.

