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April is National Distracted Driving Awareness Month

Driver Distraction a Factor in 25% of Fatal Traffic Crashes

Passengers are encouraged to Speak Up if driver is distracted

NEW YORK, March 31, 2023 -- April is National Distracted Driving Awareness Month and driver distraction continues to be a major factor in crashes that result in fatalities and serious injuries. The National Road Safety Foundation says education and intervention can help limit distracted driving.

Some sources, including the National Distracted Driving Coalition, estimate that from 25 to 30 percent of fatal crashes involve distracted driving, which translates to an estimated 11,500 to 13,800 deaths every year. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says there are more than 325,000 serious injuries every year from distracted driving crashes.

"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 eyes and mind off the road, with potentially deadly results. Even talking to other passengers can be a dangerous distraction." Part of the solution, she said, is simply becoming aware of what creates driver distraction and remembering that drivers should always keep their hands on the wheel, eyes on the road and their mind on the task of driving.

Passengers can play a significant role in reducing the number of distracted driving crashes by speaking up if they're in a vehicle being driven by someone who is distracted or driving dangerously. "Passengers shouldn't be afraid to intervene," Anderson said. "We can't let the fear of being labeled a "back-seat driver" stop us from taking steps to arrive safely. It's important that passengers speak up, perhaps offering to make or take the call or send the text message for the driver, if he or she feels it just can't wait."

Despite all the talk about distraction, most drivers continue to ignore common sense. A recent Travelers Insurance survey found that more than three-quarters of drivers said they use their cellphone while driving. More than half said they read texts or emails while driving and 27 percent said they check social media. Nineteen percent even admitted to shopping online while behind the wheel.

The risk of distraction is especially high for teen drivers. "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.

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 more than 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.