

## Welcome to the FastLane: The Official Blog of the U.S. Secretary of Transportation

The Official Blog of Ray LaHood, the U.S. Secretary of Transportation

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### April is Distracted Driving Awareness Month

April is National Distracted Driving Awareness Month, and from Virginia to California, the traffic safety community has a simple message for drivers: One Text or Call could Wreck it All.

DOT has worked hard for several years to end the deadly epidemic of distracted driving. But to kickoff this month, I want to thank the States for their efforts in this important safety fight.



In California, where texting and talking on a hand-held cell phone while driving are against the law, the California Highway Patrol (CHP) and more than 200 local law enforcement agencies will crack down on drivers text messaging and talking on their cell phones behind the wheel. Is the California law working? Just two years after the state's ban went into effect, road fatalities had fallen 22 percent.

California's Office of Traffic Safety also has a terrific campaign to educate drivers: "Don't be a zombie behind the wheel." As CHP Commissioner Joe Farrow said, "Every distraction affects a driver's reaction time, and things can change without notice. Distractions change a seemingly good driver into a zombie."



Our warmest congratulations today, from everyone at DOT, go to West Virginia. In visits to three different high schools, Governor Earl Ray Tomblin will sign the state's new texting and hand-held cell phone ban. The new law makes texting behind the wheel a primary traffic offense starting in July. Talking on a hand held cell phone will be a secondary offense beginning in July of this year, but in July 2013, that becomes a primary offense as well.

When the law takes effect, West Virginia will become only the 10th state--plus DC, Guam, and the Virgin Islands--to ban both texting and hand-held cell phone use while driving. And it's terrific that Governor Tomblin is taking the signing ceremonies to high schools, where he will be joined by friends and family of those affected by tragic distracted driving crashes; our youngest drivers need to appreciate that no text or call is worth sacrificing safety.

# ONE TEXT OR CALL COULD **WRECK** IT ALL

Even in states like Oklahoma and Texas, where state legislatures and governors have not yet enacted texting and hand-held cell phone bans, safety organizations and state DOTs are doing their best to educate drivers this month. The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) joins its safety partners to encourage drivers to refrain from engaging in non-driving activities while on the road, particularly cell phone use and texting. In its second year, TxDOT's *Talk. Text. Crash.* outreach campaign is designed to raise awareness of the horrible consequences of distracted driving.

# it's **NOT** worth **it!**

And even though the state doesn't ban specific distractions, officials from the Oklahoma Highway Safety Office say that law enforcement agencies will be watching closely this month and giving citations to drivers operating distractedly. As Sgt. Ryan Hunnicutt of the Ardmore, OK, Police Department said, "The types of accidents caused by distracted driving can be the worst we see. The accidents caused from you not paying attention so you don't have a chance to react and suddenly you're in an oncoming lane of traffic or you've hit a tree--these crashes are usually very severe."

Anyone who has watched one of DOT's Faces of Distracted Driving videos knows exactly what Sgt. Hunnicutt is talking about.



Thanks to all of the state DOTs and law enforcement agencies for promoting road safety, this month and every month. And, if you know of an organization taking steps to spread the safe driving message this National Distracted Driving Awareness Month, please post a comment below, and help them get the recognition they deserve.

*To learn more about the dangers of distracted driving and what you can do to prevent this deadly behavior, please visit [distraction.gov](http://distraction.gov).*

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