



Grand Prairie outlaws texting while driving

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Texting while driving will soon be illegal in Grand Prairie. The City Council passed a no texting-and-driving ordinance Tuesday that adds a fine up to \$200 for violators.

The decision by the city to enact its own ordinance came up soon after a measure failed in the 2013 Texas Legislature. The bill passed the Texas House but was killed in the Senate Transportation Committee because the panel chair did not bring it up for a vote.

"When the state did not pass such a law in the last session, we felt it was important for the safety of our streets and drivers to move forward with an ordinance in Grand Prairie," Police Chief Steve Dye said in a news release.

Grand Prairie joins Arlington in enacting an anti-texting ordinance.

Last year, Grand Prairie had 71 accidents caused by driver distraction, including two school buses hit by drivers who were texting, according to city spokeswoman Amy Sprinkles.

"We wanted to enact [the law] as close to the start of school as possible," Sprinkles said. "The new ordinance goes into effect Sept. 1."

Many students like to text, so informing them is a priority. Sprinkles also said that the city is partnering with the Grand Prairie school district to put up signs at the exits of all high schools this week. Signs also will be placed inside and outside of all school buses.

"The school district is totally behind the new law," Superintendent Susan Hull said in a written statement.

Nationwide, about 40 states have banned texting while driving. Texas prohibits drivers younger than 18 from using handheld communications devices and bans all drivers from using them in school zones.

In Grand Prairie, an offense under the new ordinance is not considered a moving violation and may not be made part of a person's driving record or insurance record.

The ordinance prohibits:

Sending or reading text messages and viewing pictures or written text while driving.

Gaming or any other use of the device, besides dialing telephone numbers to call to another person.

The ordinance allows:

Use while vehicle is stopped, out of moving lanes of a roadway.

Telephone conversations, including dialing or ending a call.

Use as global positioning or navigation, if device affixed to the vehicle.

Communication with 911 emergency response, fire department, law enforcement agency, hospital, physician's office or health clinic regarding a medical or other emergency to prevent injury to a person or property.

Use in reasonable belief that a person's life or safety is in immediate danger.

Use solely in voice-activated or other hands-free mode.

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