



Ontario Provincial Police
Police provinciale de l'Ontario

News Release/ Communiqué

FROM/DE: HIGHWAY SAFETY DIVISION

DATE: May 12, 2011

COUNTERING DISTRACTED DRIVING: ARE DRIVERS PAYING ATTENTION? *OPP Launches Education and Enforcement Blitz*

(ORILLIA, ON.) – How many people would knowingly get in a vehicle with a drunk driver? Would you speak out if a friend, family member or loved one was driving while impaired or would you just sit and wait to be a victim? Would you intervene if a friend or family member was talking on a hand-held phone, or texting while driving?

Research conducted in Canada and the U.S. has identified and documented the increased risks and negative impacts associated with distracted driving.

The OPP has declared: “Enough is enough!” The lack of voluntary compliance by many motorists regarding the use of hand-held devices, and other forms of distracted driving, has prompted one of the largest enforcement campaigns in recent OPP history. The week of **May 16 to May 22** will be the first of four one-week enforcement campaigns focusing on distracted driving, over the next 12 months. Education efforts are also being stepped up, using a number of innovative resources.

“People need to understand the level of risk they are dealing with; distracted driving kills! We know it is seriously under-reported in our statistics and is a major cause of collisions in Ontario,” says Chief Superintendent Bill Grodzinski, Commander of the OPP Highway Safety Division.

Distracted driving is defined as engaging in any secondary activity which takes a driver’s attention away from driving and can include: adjusting the radio, searching for something in the car; eating while driving, watching an entertainment monitor or using a hand-held communications device or other entertainment device.

Using a cell phone or device capable of texting while driving can result in a fine of \$155 under Section 78.1 of the *Highway Traffic Act* (HTA). Watching an entertainment device can result in a fine of \$110 under Section 78 of the HTA. Other forms of distracted driving can result in a charge of Careless Driving with fines ranging from \$400 to \$2,000, a possible licence suspension of up to two years and/or a jail term of not more than six months.

“Driving while distracted is bad judgement, plain and simple. There is no place for it on our roads. It is every driver’s responsibility to devote their full attention to driving,” says OPP Deputy Commissioner Larry Beechey, the Provincial Commander of Traffic Safety and Operational Support.

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Education Efforts

OPP personnel will be working with the media, schools, other law enforcement partners, road safety advocates, the Ministry of Transportation and the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police to educate drivers over the coming year about the dangers of distracted driving. The OPP has added distracted driving to its list of “Big Four” causal factors for death and injuries on Ontario highways. The other three are: aggressive driving, failure to use restraint devices and driving while impaired.

Media Resources

Radio stations are invited to download and use Public Service Announcements about the dangers of distracted driving from <http://www.opp.ca/ecms/index.php?id=545>. A video on the same subject is available on the same page.

Fast Facts on Distracted Driving

- In 2010, the OPP charged **8,522** drivers under Section 78.1 of the HTA for using a hand-held device while driving.
- Police began enforcing the new distraction legislation in January 2010.
- In **2010**, there were **7,733 collisions** on OPP-patrolled roads where the driver was deemed to be inattentive/distracted, resulting in **35 deaths, 1,040 injuries and considerable property damage**. (Note: The preceding statistics refer to all forms of distracted/inattentive driving, not just the use of hand-held devices as outlined in Section 78.1, HTA.)
- A recent study by researchers at the University of Utah concluded that drivers on mobile phones are more impaired than drivers driving over the legal limit.
- A Canadian Automobile Association poll of 6,000 Canadian drivers found that “texting while driving” is the single biggest traffic safety concern of drivers while on the road.
- A recent Ontario Health E-Bulletin indicated: “Teen-driver car crashes remain the leading cause of permanent injury and death in Canada, the United States and almost every industrialized nation world wide”. The main culprit is teenage overconfidence in emerging driving skills and a failure to acknowledge personal limitations. Teenagers falsely believe they can “drive distracted” without increasing the risk of a serious collision.

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Links

University of Utah Study

<http://www.psych.utah.edu/lab/appliedcognition/publications.html>

Canadian Automobile Association Poll

<http://www.caa.ca/newsroom/newsroom-releases-details-e.cfm?newsItem=38&yearToShow=2010>

Ontario Health E-Bulletin

<http://www.ohpe.ca/node/198>

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