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PRESS RELEASE

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Survey Shows California Drivers Recognize Dangers of Drug-impaired Driving

Driver Opinion Survey Cites Cell Phone Use as Biggest Safety Problem

Sacramento, CA – Over 95 percent of California drivers perceived the emerging problem of driving under the influence of legal and illegal drugs as a problem. In keeping with the serious outlook, 71.5 percent see it as a “very big problem.” These and other opinions of driving habits are included in the results of the annual Traffic Safety Survey, released today by the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS).

The survey showed that sobriety checkpoints are overwhelmingly supported, by a rate of almost 90 percent. Less than one percent of drivers think that driving under the influence of drugs should result in a less serious penalty than that for alcohol-impaired driving.

California drivers ranked cell phone talking and texting as the biggest safety problems on the road in 2012, at an even higher rate than in 2011 when the distractions moved ahead of speeding and aggressive driving at the top spot. Not surprisingly, cell phone talking and texting were ranked highest by 80 percent of drivers as the most serious distractions on the road.

“With this third year of survey results, we’re able to now see which problems and issues people are reacting to and which are remaining relatively constant,” said OTS Director Christopher J. Murphy. “Cell phone use is obviously top of mind right now, which is good, but they still recognize the huge dangers posed by things like drug-impaired and alcohol-impaired driving, and aggressive driving.”

In 2012, cell phone talking and texting combined were cited by 51.5 percent of respondents as being the biggest safety problems, up from 38.8 percent in 2011 and only 18.3 percent in 2010. Since 2010, texting as the biggest problem has jumped from only 2.4 percent to 24.9 percent. Speeding and aggressive driving was cited next most often with 22.7 percent. The only other two categories polling over 10 percent were bad road surfaces at 16.5 percent and “other driver behavior” at 15.3 percent.

(more)

The statewide survey was conducted in late summer with 1,887 drivers age 18 and over interviewed at gas stations in 15 counties throughout California. The results will help the California Office of Traffic Safety and those involved in the Strategic Highway Safety Plan better identify and track driver attitudes, self-reported driving behavior, awareness of high visibility enforcement efforts and traffic safety issue awareness and education campaigns.

“With crash data, we can see what drivers are doing,” said Murphy. “With this data, we can see what they are thinking. This is an invaluable tool for planning to improve safe driving attitudes and behaviors. Changed behaviors turn into saved lives.”

Additional results include:

- Older drivers more frequently stated that cell phone conversations are the most serious distraction while younger respondents more frequently believe texting to be the most serious distraction.
- In two new questions this year, 51 percent of drivers thought that it was very likely or somewhat likely for someone to get a ticket for hand-held cell use or texting, and nearly 42 percent correctly chose \$159 as the minimum ticket cost for cell phone use. Twenty-five percent thought it was lower and 33 percent picked a higher cost.
- Sixty percent say that they have been hit or nearly hit by someone talking or texting on a cell phone, while nearly 45 percent admit to making a driving mistake while talking on a cell phone.
- The percentage of drivers talking “regularly” or “sometimes” on a hand-held cell while driving ranged from 7.7 percent of the 70-or-older drivers to 31.1 percent of the 25 to 34-year-old drivers.
- While a larger proportion of male drivers than female drivers said they “regularly” or “sometimes” talked on a hand-held cell while driving (26.6 percent of males versus 17.9 percent of females) or texted (17.7 percent of males versus 14.2 percent of females), all drivers believe that women talk or text more (42.3percent) than men (7.8 percent).
- Nearly 68 percent of southern Californians considered cell phone talking and texting as the biggest problem on the road, compared to 48 percent in central California and 34 percent in northern California. Bad road surfaces are considered bigger in the north (20.4 percent) and central (19.5 percent) than in the south (12.5 percent)
- Southern Californians text more often (19.3 percent “regularly” or “sometimes”) than central (12.2 percent) or northern (14.6 percent) California drivers.
- When given a choice of several different options for how much they thought a hand-held cell or texting ticket cost, older drivers thought it was higher than it really is while younger drivers thought it was lower.

For full survey results, visit www.ots.ca.gov.