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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
June 22, 2016

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DRIVER CELL PHONE USAGE UP DESPITE OBVIOUS DANGERS

SACRAMENTO, Calif. - Despite the well-known dangers of distracted driving, the number of California drivers who use mobile devices while they drive is on the rise.

In a study conducted by the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) in April 2016, at least 12.8 percent of California drivers were observed using a mobile device during the day, up from 9.2 percent in 2015 and eclipsing the previous high of 10.8 percent in 2013. Due to the difficulty of observing mobile device use in a vehicle, these figures are considered minimums, with actual usage likely several points higher.

“These latest numbers are discouraging, but not totally unexpected,” said OTS Director Rhonda Craft. “The number of smartphones in the United States has gone from zero, 10 years ago, to over 200 million today. They have become so much a part of our lives that we can’t put them down, even when we know the danger.”

California and many other states observed National Distracted Driving Awareness Month in April. The California Highway Patrol (CHP) and hundreds of other law enforcement agencies conducted educational and enforcement efforts. The CHP alone organized more than 300 educational presentations and issued 13,496 citations for distracted driving violations. The OTS conducted a social media campaign urging drivers to *Silence the Distraction*.

“Distraction occurs any time drivers take their eyes off the road, their hands off the wheel, and their minds off their primary task of driving safely,” CHP Commissioner Joe Farrow said. “Any non-driving activity is a potential distraction and increases the risk of a collision.”

Data from the CHP’s Statewide Integrated Traffic Records System shows that in 2013, 22,306 people were involved in collisions in which distracted driving was a factor. The number of distracted driving victims in California increased slightly in 2014, to 22,652. From 2013 to 2015, the number of drivers killed or injured in collisions in which distracted driving was a factor increased every year, from 10,162 in 2013, to 10,548 in 2014, and to 11,090 in 2015.

(more)

Despite these numbers, drivers seem less concerned about the dangers of distracted driving. The OTS study found that the observed usage rates appear to confirm previous studies, which show more drivers admit to using mobile devices “sometimes” or “regularly.” Fewer drivers believe that talking or texting on a cell phone is a major safety problem. Meanwhile, the percentage of those who say they have been hit or nearly hit by a driver using a cell phone remains steady at nearly 60 percent.

Other significant findings in the observational survey:

- Though nearly all types of usage were up, typing and posting increased by more than one third.
- The highest observed electronic device use and the fastest increase in usage is in urban areas, at 9.4 percent.
- Electronic device use during rush hours increased by 71 percent in 2016.
- The percentage of 16-24 year-olds talking on hand-held cell phones increased from less than 1 percent every year since 2012 to more than 2 percent in 2016.
- Southern California drivers hold the phone to their ear at a rate double (3.8 percent) or more that of Central California drivers (1.9 percent) and Northern California drivers (1.4 percent).

“The study results are disturbing,” Commissioner Farrow said. “Every time someone drives distracted, they are putting themselves, their passengers and everyone on or near the roadway at risk.”

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