



BLUE RIDGE TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD NEWS RELEASE

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Contact:

Howard Hall

Roanoke County Police Chief/ Board Chairman

hhall@roanokecountyva.gov

Dan Freeman

Carilion Trauma Outreach Coordinator/Vice Chairman

dwfreeman@carilionclinic.org

Blue Ridge Transportation Safety Board Supports Distracted Driving Month

Buckle Up, Phone Down

Today we join DRIVE SMART Virginia in supporting Distracted Driving Month and we call on all drivers in our region to avoid any distraction when they're driving. Distracted driving occurs when driving becomes secondary in importance to another activity happening while the vehicle is in motion. Though there are many forms of distracted driving, such as adjusting a stereo, eating, or using navigation systems, cell phone use is by far the most prevalent distraction leading to crashes and near-crashes. But, because text messaging requires visual, manual, and cognitive attention from the driver, it is by far the most alarming form of driver distraction.

The National Safety Council reports 1.6 million crashes each year involve a driver talking on cell phones or texting. Though distracted driving is a problem with all ages, the greatest proportion of distracted drivers are under the age of 20. According to the Pew Research Center, 40% of American teens say they have been in a car when the driver used a cell phone in a way that placed others in danger. According to research by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute (VTTI), nearly 80% of crashes and 65% of near crashes involved some form of driver inattention within three seconds of the event. A quick look away from the road could have disastrous consequences.

"It is obvious to see the problem of distracted driving by noting the number of people seen daily focused on a cell phone instead of the road," said Chief Howard Hall. "My career has been focused on improving traffic safety and I wonder when people will begin to realize the true dangers associated with distracted driving?"

Naturalistic driving studies- using sophisticated cameras and instrumentation in participant's personal vehicles- conducted by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute provide a clear picture of driver distraction. According to their research, a texting driver is 23 times more likely to be involved in a crash as an alert driver. The average driver texting takes their eyes off the road for 4.6 seconds during a six second interval. A driver traveling 55 miles per hour would have traveled the length of a football field without looking at the roadway. Research by Carnegie Mellon indicates that driving while using a cell phone reduces the amount of brain activity

associated with driving by 37%. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, cell phone users are 18% slower to take action when seeing brake lights.

Take a look at these Virginia statistics for 2012.

- 107,240 total crashes
- 58, 547 people were injured in these crashes
- 773 people died in motor vehicle crashes
- 80% of crashes and 65% of near crashes are caused by distracted driving

“Working in the field of trauma services, I have seen first hand the serious injuries and deaths that occur when drivers are not paying attention to the road,” said Dan Freeman. “The best solution is to turn off their phone or hand it to a passenger. The importance of a phone call or text message is not worth the risk of being severely injured or killed.”

The Blue Ridge Transportation Safety Board (BRTSB) encourages everyone to get involved with promoting distraction-free driving in our region. Post distraction-free driving messages on your Facebook page, send an e-mail company wide reminding employees, or include the message in a company or organizational newsletter. Encourage family, friends and coworkers to sign a pledge to never drive distracted. A sample pledge can be found at www.drivesmartva.org.

For the past 25 years, the mission of the BRTSB has been to coordinate and promote traffic safety programs, projects, and educational initiatives while providing a professional network for guidance and support within the region. The BRTSB is composed of traffic safety advocates from both public and private sectors.

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