**Distracted Driving Talking Points**

**Key Messages**

**1) Distracted driving takes away hopes, dreams and lives and can leave people with serious injuries that tragically affect their day-to-day living.**

* Almost 30,000 crashes were distracted driving-related from 2019-2023, contributing to 1 in 11 crashes in Minnesota.
* In 2023, preliminary figures show distracted driving contributed to 136 serious injuries and 33 deaths.
* Distracted driving contributes to an average of 29 deaths and 146 serious, life-changing injuries a year on the road (2019 – 2023).
* Distracted driving contributes to 9 percent of crashes in Minnesota.
* As alarming as these statistics are, distracted-driving crashes are very difficult to investigate. Actual distraction-attributed crashes are underreported.

**2) It’s a myth to think we can multitask behind the wheel.**

* Distractions of any kind are all potentially deadly:
  + There’s **visual** distraction like looking away from the road.
  + There’s **physical** distraction like taking your hands off the wheel to do something else.
  + There’s **cognitive** distraction like being lost in thought.
  + There’s the **combination of all of these** like texting while driving.
  + If you text while driving, on average, you take your eyes off the road for up to 4.6 out of every six seconds. That’s like traveling the length of a football field at 55 mph hours without looking up.
* No one intends to seriously injure or kill someone by driving distracted. But good intentions don’t prevent crashes — smart choices do.

**3) Drive smart: Park the phone and put other distractions away.**

* Minnesotans are making progress but we have a ways to go to be distraction free.
* In 2010, there were:
  + 75 distraction-related traffic fatalities.
  + 234 suspected serious injuries.
* In 2023, preliminary figures show there were:
  + 33 distraction-related traffic fatalities.
  + 136 suspected serious injuries.
* More recent figures show:

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| **Distracted Driving** | **2019** | **2020** | **2021** | **2022** | **2023** | **Total** |  |
| **Fatalities** | 34 | 32 | 27 | 22 | 33 | 148 |  |
| **Serious Injuries** | 153 | 161 | 154 | 126 | 136 | 730 |  |

* Before heading out, do what you can to eliminate distractions — set your music, put your phone out of reach or go hands free, and figure out your directions.
* HANDS-FREE LAW: The law allows a driver to use their cell phone to make calls, text, listen to music or podcasts and get directions, but only by voice commands or single-touch activation without holding the phone. Fines include:
  + $100 or more including court fees for a first offense.
  + $300 or more including court fees for a second and/or subsequent offense.
* No longer can drivers hold the phone in their hand while driving. Accessing or posting on social media, streaming videos, checking that box score or Googling information on a device while driving are all still against the law in Minnesota, even in hands-free mode.
* If you injure or kill someone while violating the hands-free law, you can face a felony charge of criminal vehicular operation or homicide.
* Visit [HandsFreeMN.org](https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/ots/hands-free/Pages/default.aspx) and [DriveSmartMN.org](https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/ots/drive-smart/Pages/default.aspx) for more information.

**Background Information**

* Extra distracted driving enforcement runs April 1-30 on Minnesota roads.
* Law enforcement agencies across Minnesota participate in the campaign coordinated by the Minnesota Department of Public Safety Office of Traffic Safety (OTS).
  + Five seconds is the average time your eyes are off the road while texting (Virginia Tech Transportation Institute).
  + A quarter of teens respond to a text message once or more every time they drive (University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute).
  + Reaching for a phone, dialing or texting increases the risk of getting into a crash by three times (Virginia Tech Transportation Institute).
  + Distracted driving crashes are likely under-reported due to law enforcement’s challenge in determining distraction as a crash factor.
  + Using a cell phone while driving, whether hands-free or hand-held, delays a driver’s reactions as much as having an alcohol-concentration level of .08 percent. (University of Utah)
  + One-third of drivers admitted to texting while driving, and three-quarters said they’ve seen others do it (2015 Erie Insurance survey).

Additional Talking Points

* Distracted driving is a leading factor in crashes each year in Minnesota — it’s important to realize that distracted driving is not just the usual suspects of cell phones and texting. It can include daydreaming, putting attention toward something outside of the vehicle, eating, reaching for items, changing music, and dealing with rowdy passengers or kids.
* Before you start to drive, you need to get focused for the drive. Take the steps to put your attention on the road — set your music, put your phones out of reach, know your directions.
* If you’re a passenger, speak up to stop a driver from distracted actions. And even if you are outside of the vehicle —when you call someone on their cell, ask them if they are driving. If they are, ask them to call you back when it’s safe.

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