

Road Safety News

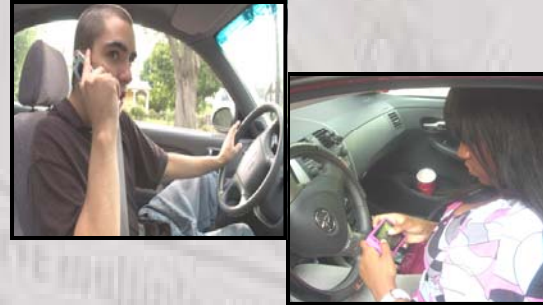
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Breaking news

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Distracted Driving Update



Distracted driving has quickly become the focus of the traffic safety community and the public at large. It seems to have happened due to the intersection of two things in the past year - a series of in-depth articles in the New York Times under the heading "Driven to Distraction," and the convening of the Distracted Driving Summit last September by U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood.

Congratulations to New York Times reporter Matt Richtel, who this week won the Pulitzer Prize for his distracted driving series. He and The Times also won a special award for the series last week from the World Traffic Safety Symposium, held at the New York Auto Show.

Kudos also go to Secretary LaHood, who has made the "distracted driving epidemic" one of his agency's top priorities. Using the considerable resources and influence of the Federal government, he has mobilized the traffic safety community and many states to take this issue seriously and take real action.

The Secretary has embraced a project undertaken by NRSE, with our partner NOYS, to give young people an opportunity to add their voices to the distracted driving discussion. Secretary LaHood will introduce the winner, Bethany Brown and her completed Public Service Announcement at a news conference on April 29 in Washington.

Iowa recently became the 21st state to ban texting for all drivers. Under the ban, it's a primary offense for teens to talk on a cell phone or text while driving. For adult drivers, using a hand-held cell phone or texting is a secondary offense which allows law enforcement officials to ticket drivers if they are pulled over for another offense.

According to research by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, distracted or inattentive driving accounts for an estimated 6,000 deaths and half-a-million injuries in 2008. In 2009, more than 200 distracted driving bills were under consideration by state legislatures, and the pace is expected to increase this year.

NHTSA has developed sample legislation that states can use as a starting point to craft measures to ban texting. The sample bill is patterned after President Obama's October 1, 2009, Executive Order prohibiting federal employees from texting while operating government-owned vehicles and equipment. Secretary LaHood has also initiated rulemaking to prohibit texting by commercial truck and bus drivers.

The Department of Transportation has also launched a federal website, www.distraction.gov, as a forum on distracted driving and as an information clearinghouse.
