

CHP cracking down on cell phone users

California Highway Patrol officers will conduct a “zero tolerance” cell phone enforcement day, aimed at citing drivers who are distracted by their cell phones for 24 hours starting Feb. 8 at 6am.

The campaign is designed to deter people from using their cell phones if they don't have a hands-free device or who are texting while driving.

Cell phones are one of the leading, identifiable, contributing factors in inattentive traffic collisions in California. According to the CHP's Statewide Integrated Traffic Records System data, since the inception of the hands-free law, there have been 1,303 collisions throughout the state, where a contributing factor was inattention by the driver due to cell phone usage. Those same collisions resulted in 17 fatalities and more than 800 victims injured. The law, which went into effect July 1, 2008, prohibits the use of handheld cell phones by all motorists. In addition, it forbids anyone under the age of 18 from using any type of cell phone—handheld or hands free—while driving. Six months later, a ban on text messaging by drivers was put into effect.

Since the law's inception in July 2008 through December 2010, CHP officers have issued 329,602 citations statewide to motorists who were in violation of the hands-free law and 5100 citations statewide for texting while driving, according to SWITRS.

Cell phone violations carry a minimum base fine of \$20 for the first offense and \$50 for the second. When court costs and other fees are added to the fines, the total cost of the violation exceeds \$100 for the first offense.