

S. Tahoe cops clamping down on drivers using cell phones

How often do you see drivers texting or talking with hand-held cell phones and wish they would be stopped and cited? California's second annual Distracted Driving Awareness Month this April will once again find law enforcement in the South Lake Tahoe joining in statewide zero tolerance enforcement efforts for illegal cell phone use and texting violations.

A ticket for violating either the hands free or no texting law costs a minimum of \$159, and subsequent tickets cost \$279.

South Lake Tahoe Police Department will join hundreds of police and sheriff departments plus the CHP to conduct distracted driving enforcement operations.

Drivers who use hand-held devices are four times as likely to get into crashes serious enough to injure themselves, officers say. Younger, inexperienced drivers under 20 years old have the highest proportion of distraction-related fatal crashes. In addition, studies show that texting while driving can delay a driver's reaction time just as severely as having a blood alcohol content of a legally drunk driver.

There are simple measures drivers can take to minimize distractions in the vehicle:

- Turn your phone off or put it out of reach before starting the car.
- Alert callers that you are unable to take calls when driving by changing your voicemail message.
- Make it a point not to call or text anyone who may be driving, such as during the commute to and from work or school, especially parents calling teen drivers.

- If you do need to make an important call or respond to a text message, pull over to a safe place to do so.
- If going cold turkey is too much of a stretch and you just can't turn your phone off, consider using one of the available mobile phone apps that holds calls and incoming texts.