

S. Tahoe officers on mission to stop drivers from using cell phones

The South Lake Tahoe Police Department has teamed up with the California Office of Traffic Safety, U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, California Highway Patrol, and 36 other law enforcement agencies across the greater Sacramento region to eliminate motorists' handheld cell phone use and texting.

The effort is a special federally funded pilot program using the region to test tactics that may be employed nationally in the future.

Beginning today and lasting through Dec. 9, South Lake Tahoe officers will be out in force to issue tickets to drivers using handheld cell phones or texting. Nationally in 2010, 3,092 people were killed, and an estimated 416,000 others were injured in motor vehicle crashes involving a distracted driver.

Officers say because too many drivers still don't get the message that using a cell phone while driving can be dangerous and deadly, this initial distracted driving crackdown marks the first of many enforcement waves taking place over the next year.

California's distracted driving law bans all drivers from using handheld devices and texting while operating a motor vehicle.

Distracted drivers in South Lake Tahoe talking on a handheld cell phone or texting will receive a first-time ticket costing a minimum of \$159, with a second offense costing \$279. But the goal of the special enforcement operation is not to issue

tickets, but to raise awareness of the dangers of distracted driving.