

Opinion: Bringing awareness to distracted driving

By Shannon Laney

To save lives and educate all Californians, especially young drivers, about the dangers of distracted driving, the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS), California Highway Patrol (CHP), Impact Teen Drivers, and more than 200 law enforcement agencies statewide are working together on increased education and enforcement efforts for National Distracted Driving Awareness Month in April and California Teen Safe Driving Week, the first week of April.

Driving takes one's full attention and any distraction can have deadly, dangerous consequences. Imagine driving for 4 to 5 seconds while blindfolded. That can be the effect of looking down to send a text message. In the average time it takes to check a text message – less than 5 seconds – a car travelling 60 mph will travel more than the length of a football field.

Throughout the month of April, police, sheriff and the CHP will focus on educating the public about the dangers of driving distracted through local media interviews, visits to schools, and traffic safety presentations. In addition, April 15 has been earmarked for special statewide high visibility enforcement days for all law enforcement agencies that are participating in the national traffic safety campaign.

The urge to read and answer an incoming message when we hear the text sound can be almost overwhelming. The Office of Traffic Safety is using a message of Silence the Distraction in new public service announcements aimed at getting drivers to turn off their phones while driving so they won't be tempted.

"No text, call, or social media update is worth a crash," said

OTS Director Rhonda Craft. "With an average of less than a second to react to an urgent situation, drivers need to have all their attention on the roadway."

While distracted driving can take on many forms and affects all road users, young drivers are at a greater risk. During "California Teen Safe Driving Week," April 1-7, Impact Teen Drivers will focus on educating teens that their number one killer – reckless and distracted driving – is 100% preventable.

"People are realizing that everyday behaviors, such as texting or reaching for a dropped item, can be lethal when done behind the wheel," Kelly Browning, executive director of Impact Teen Drivers.

Each of us must drive responsibly, keeping full attention to the task at hand – driving. If you have teenagers in your family who are driving, make sure they understand the laws and what their responsibilities are as well. The collective goal with this month-long campaign is to change the behavior of all drivers. That change begins with education.

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