

Cops targeting distracted drivers

Distracted driving is such an important safety issue that April is recognized as National Distracted Driving Awareness Month.

In California, law enforcement officials are joining the Office of Traffic Safety, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and the National Transportation Safety Board to focus on education as well as enforcement. The purpose of the campaign is to raise awareness about the dangers of distracted driving in an attempt to change behavior and save lives, not just in April but also year-round.

South Lake Tahoe Police Department will join statewide enforcement campaigns on April 7 and April 20 when all agencies will be especially vigilant for distracted drivers. Although the purpose of the campaign is not to write as many citations as possible, sometimes citations are necessary for drivers to understand the importance of focusing on their driving.

Distracted driving continues to be a problem, especially as the use of Smartphones increase. Although such crashes are often difficult to prove, California had at least 84 fatal distracted driving collisions in 2013, 85 in 2014 and 67 in 2015, with the actual number of cases likely higher. The number of injury collisions for the same three-year period shows an increase: 10,078 in 2013; 10,463 in 2014, and 11,023 in 2015. NHTSA data for 2014 show nationwide, 3,179 people died in distracted driving collisions, which is 10 percent of all crash fatalities. An additional 431,000 people, or 18 percent, were injured in motor vehicle collisions involving distracted drivers.

Distracted driving is any activity that could divert a person's attention away from the primary task of driving. These types of distractions include:

- Texting
- Using a cellphone or smartphone
- Eating and drinking
- Talking to passengers
- Grooming
- Reading, including maps
- Using a navigation system
- Watching a video
- Adjusting a radio, CD player, or MP3 player.