

Matt Harvey

KINS Community Comment for April 17th, 2012

This is Officer Matt Harvey with the California Highway Patrol for community comment. Danger lurks behind the wheel when a driver redirects their attention from the road to some other distracting behavior, like talking on a cell phone or texting. During the month of April, law enforcement agencies throughout Humboldt County and California will be especially focused on taking enforcement action on these inattentive, "zombie" drivers.

The California Highway Patrol along with the California Office of Traffic Safety, Impact Teen Drivers, and law enforcement agencies statewide launched the second annual National Distracted Driving Awareness Month campaign, "It's Not Worth It!" During the campaign kickoff month in April 2011, more than 52,000 citations were issued by law enforcement statewide, four times the monthly average. A first time citation will cost a minimum of \$159, with a second violation at least \$279.

~~Drivers need to ask themselves if a phone call or text message is worth their life or the lives of those around them. The answer is simple, it's not worth it. Every distraction affects a driver's reaction time, and things can change without notice.~~

In recent years, hundreds of people have been killed in California, while thousands were injured, as the result of collisions that involved at least one driver who was distracted. This distraction can be any activity that diverts the driver's attention away from the primary task of driving. According to a study conducted by Carnegie Mellon University, the act of talking on a cell phone can reduce more than 35 percent of the brain activity needed for driving. Essentially distractions change a seemingly good driver into a "zombie" behind the wheel.

Parents and other adults need to set a positive example. Start by never calling or texting anyone, especially your kids, when there's a possibility they might be driving. Then let that same action follow you when you are the driver.

Among the more than 1,800 drivers over the age of 18 who participated in last year's annual statewide traffic safety survey conducted by the California Office of Traffic Safety, talking and texting on a cellular telephone were rated the two biggest safety problems on California's roadways. In fact, talking on a cell phone (handheld or hands-free) was identified as the most serious distraction by 56 percent of the respondents.

Adults are not the only offenders when it comes to distracted driving. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, teen drivers are more likely than any other age group to be involved in a fatal crash where distraction was involved.

Teens, even more than adults, are accustomed to using technology to have instant access to their friends. It's not only technology - teens are frequently distracted by loud music,

passengers, and other everyday tasks that, when done behind the wheel, become lethal. These everyday distractions, coupled with inexperience, often have deadly consequences.

Law enforcement sees firsthand the devastation caused by distracted driving and the needless pain associated with the senseless collisions that follow.

Don't be "zombie" drivers; focus on the task of driving when you are behind the wheel. Remember, whatever the distraction, "It's Not Worth It!" This has been Officer Matt Harvey with the California Highway Patrol for community comment.