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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

State to Study Ways to Combat Distracted Driving *Researchers will test dynamic message signs coupled with enforcement*

Starting today and running through October 19, researchers from Michigan State University (MSU) will be working with police agencies in Kent and Wayne counties to evaluate methods of enforcing distracted driving and cell phone use violations.

During the two-week period, dynamic message signs will be used off-and-on to alert drivers to the highly visible enforcement. Researchers seek to determine if targeted safety messages have any measurable impact on driver behavior.

“Distracted driving, and cell phone use specifically, continue to be significant traffic safety concerns nationwide,” said Dr. Peter Savolainen, MSU Foundation Professor in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering. “This project aims to assess the effectiveness of high visibility enforcement, in combination with different types of messages that discourage cell phone use by drivers.”



Dynamic message signs are roadside signs with easily changeable electronic messages.

Participating law enforcement agencies are the Detroit Police Department, Michigan State Police (MSP) Second District, Wayne County Sheriff's Office, Grand Rapids Police Department, Wyoming Police Department, MSP Sixth District, and Kent County Sheriff's

Office. They will conduct up to 1,000 hours of distracted driving enforcement.

In Michigan during 2019, 70 people were killed in distracted driving crashes.

“Texting and driving is one of the most dangerous acts one can do behind the wheel,” said Michael L. Prince, Michigan Office of Highway Safety Planning (OHSP) director. “We hope this research will provide us with new strategies in combating this deadly problem.”

This research is part of a nationwide project sponsored by the National Safety Council. It will continue from April 5, 2021 through April 26, 2021.

Kent and Wayne counties were selected to participate because of their high number of fatal and serious injury crashes. From 2016-2018, there were 188 fatal or serious injury distracted driving crashes in Wayne County and 128 in Kent County, the two highest in the state.

Michigan law prohibits a driver from reading, manually typing, or sending a text message while driving. Exceptions are in place for reporting crashes, crimes or other emergencies.

The research project is supported with federal traffic safety funds provided by the United States Department of Transportation and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and enforcement will be coordinated by the OHSP.

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