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April 7, 2021
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Increased enforcement push, MSU research study part of effort to decrease distracted driving crashes

"U Drive. U Text. U Pay." leads Distracted Driving Awareness Month effort

In support of *National Distracted Driving Awareness Month* in April, law enforcement agencies will be joining forces across the country this week to promote enforcement and awareness of state and local texting and distracted-driving laws.

This annual campaign is part of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA) *U Drive. U Text. U Pay.* high-visibility enforcement effort that runs from April 8 to April 12, 2021.

According to the Michigan State Police (MSP) Criminal Justice Information Center (CJIC), in 2019 there were 18,096 distracted driving crashes in Michigan, resulting in 70 fatalities. Nationwide in 2019, the number of fatalities linked to driver distraction was 3,142, or nearly nine percent of all fatalities that year. This included 566 non-occupants (pedestrians, bicyclists, and others) killed in crashes involving a distracted driver.

"Any activity that takes your eyes off the road and your hands off the wheel is extremely reckless and puts you and others on the road at risk," said Michael L. Prince, Michigan Office of Highway Safety Planning (OHSP) director. "Whether it's texting, eating, drinking, using GPS or talking to other passengers, it's all dangerous while driving."

Also, continuing through April 26, 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 three-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."

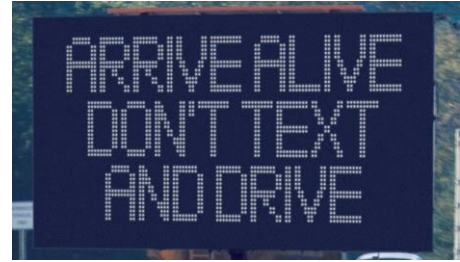
Participating law enforcement agencies are the Detroit Police Department, MSP Second District, Wayne County Sheriff's Office, Grand Rapids Police Department, Wyoming PD, MSP Sixth District, and Kent County Sheriff's Office. They will conduct up to 1,000 hours of distracted driving enforcement.



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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.

For more information about distracted driving, visit www.trafficsafetymarketing.gov.