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Alaska Joins Campaign to Cut Down on Distracted Driving

Alaska State Troopers and the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities are joining in the national campaign this week to urge drivers to cut down on distractions and keep their eyes on the road while behind the wheel.

AST's Alaska Bureau of Highway Patrol and DOT&PF's Alaska Highway Safety Office and Central Region Traffic Office are participating in the national campaign urging drivers to hang up and drive Friday, April 30. All drivers are asked to refrain from using cell phones, which studies have proven cause a distraction while driving. The campaign hopes people will either pull over in a safe place to take the call or return the call after reaching their destination. Electronic signs from DOT&PF relaying the message "Distracted Driving Kills. Don't Text and Drive" are posted on both the Glenn and Seward Highways outside of Anchorage for three days starting today.

Alaska enacted a law on Sept. 1, 2008 banning not only texting while driving, but viewing any type of screen device with the exception of cell phones or personal data assistants being used for verbal communication or displaying caller identification information (Sec 28.35.161). Alaska is one of 23 states to ban texting. Six states, not including Alaska, prohibit all drivers from using handheld cell phones while driving.

According to the DOT&PF, 335 crashes involved cell phone use during 2002-2007. Fortunately, none were fatal. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration states that in 2008, about 6,000 people died in crashes that involved distracted driving. Distracted driving applies to anything that takes your eyes off the road, your hands off the steering wheel or interrupts your concentration while driving.

"Pay attention to the road. Pay attention to your surroundings," said Alaska State Trooper Capt. Hans Brinke, commander of the ABHP.

The Alaska State Troopers formed the ABHP in 2008 to partner with the DOT&PF's Highway Safety Office and its efforts to bring the number of major injury and fatal collisions down to zero.

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For more information, visit the following websites:

Governors Highway Safety Association website which talks about the Oprah "No Phone Zone" event:

<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/state-highway-safety-agencies-supporting-oprahs-no-phone-zone-day-92107349.html>

http://www.dot.state.ak.us/stwdplng/hwysafety/assets/2002-2007_Cell_Phone_Use_Stats.pdf

National data:

<http://www.ghsa.org/html/issues/cellphone.html>

<http://www.nhtsa.gov/Distracted>

<http://www.nhtsa.gov/Driving+Safety/Distracted+Driving/Policy+Statement+and+Compiled+FAQs+on+Distracted+Driving>

The new US Gov site dedicated to Distracted Driving:

<http://www.distraction.gov/>