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New Study Shows Rising Use of Cell Phones While Driving

(Sacramento, CA) – The Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) and the California Highway Patrol (CHP) today released a new study showing a 39 percent increase in the percentage of California drivers seen using a cell phone while driving.

“It’s shocking that nearly 10 percent of motorists were observed using their cell phones while driving a motor vehicle, a potentially-lethal combination,” said Office of Traffic Safety Director Ronda Craft. “We will continue our aggressive public outreach campaign and our partnership with law enforcement to educate the public about the dangers of those who drive distracted and put the lives of others at risk.”

During the study, which was conducted by the Office of Traffic Safety and the University of California, Berkeley Safe Transportation Research and Education Center, researchers observed motorist behavior. This year, 9.2 percent of motorists were spotted using a cell phone while driving, up from 6.6 percent of drivers in 2014. The highest level recorded since research began was 10.8 percent of motorists using a cell phone in 2012.

During April’s Distracted Driving Awareness Month, approximately 250 law enforcement agencies across California ticketed more than 46,000 drivers using a cell phone while driving—roughly double the number of tickets issued during the average month. Although there were fewer citations for hand-held talking on cell phones, law enforcement wrote 35 percent more tickets for texting-while-driving compared to 2014.

“Discouraging drivers from operating a vehicle while distracted is a challenge that law enforcement is faced with year-round,” said CHP Commissioner Joe Farrow. “By raising awareness through education and enforcement, we are working toward changing the dangerous behavior of using a cell phone while driving – and the purpose is to save lives.”

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 80 percent of vehicle crashes involve some sort of driver inattention and approximately 3,000 people were killed nationwide last year in collisions involving a distracted driver. Texting takes a driver’s eyes off the road for an average of five seconds – enough time to travel the length of a football field, essentially driving blindfolded for 120 yards.

A public awareness campaign, “Silence the Distraction,” that emphasized how distracting talking or texting can be while driving, accompanied April’s law enforcement effort. A tour of 11 community college campuses brought the message of traffic safety with interactive games, information booths, and student engagement. The Office of Traffic Safety sponsors television advertisements illustrating how distracting text messages can make it seem like the car is full of demanding people screaming for a driver’s attention. Caltrans is also supporting the public outreach efforts with changeable message signs warning about the dangers of texting or talking while driving.

For more information about the dangers of distracted driving, and the ongoing campaign to combat it in California, visit: http://www.ots.ca.gov/Media_and_Research/Campaigns/Distracted_Driving.asp . The full report can be found at [2015 Cell Phone Observational Survey](#).

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