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NHTSA and VT Highway Safety Advocates Remind Drivers to Give Driving Their Full Attention

Barre, VT — The U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and Vermont highway safety advocates are launching a high-visibility enforcement effort from April 10-14 as part of National Distracted Driving Awareness Month to deter distracted driving. Law enforcement officers nationwide will make extra efforts to enforce laws pertaining to texting and distracted driving as a reminder to all to drive with their full attention and avoid distractions.

To support this effort, the Vermont Agency of Transportation's State Highway Safety Office (SHSO) held a Distracted Driving Awareness Press Conference today at the Vermont State Police Westminster Barracks in Putney. Representatives from the SHSO, Vermont State Police and other Vermont and New Hampshire law enforcement agencies, AOT, the American Automobile Association (AAA), and the cellular service provider AT&T attended. The goal of this press conference was to bring together public and private stakeholders who dedicate their work to keeping Vermont's roads safer for all road users, and to raise awareness about the risks of distracted driving.

"Distracted driving is a leading cause of vehicle crashes on our roads, and most of this distraction can be attributed to cell phone use," said Transportation Secretary Joe Flynn. "Using a phone while driving is dangerous and against the law in Vermont, and we urge all Vermonters to make the safe choice and refrain from phone use and other distractions while driving."

According to NHTSA, in 2022 in the United States, 3,308 people were killed and an estimated additional 289,310 people were injured in traffic crashes involving distracted drivers. Due to data collection limitations, however, we know that these are underestimations.

In Vermont, during the past five years (2020-2024), there have been 33 fatalities attributed to distracted driving, which means that 9.6% of all vehicle-related fatalities involved a distracted driver. In the last ten years (2015-2024), 74 fatalities on Vermont roads were caused by a distracted driver and distracted driving was a factor in 11.4% of all crash-related fatalities.

Drivers will see increased law enforcement efforts in Vermont from April 10-14 as officers will be stopping and ticketing anyone who is seen texting and driving. First-time distracted driving penalties for a junior operator are \$162, 2 points on the license, and a 30-day license suspension. First-time violation penalties for an adult driver are a \$162 fine and 2 points. There are also significant additional penalties for distracted driving in school zones and work zones (23 VSA 1095a and 1095b).

NHTSA and the SHSO urge drivers to put their phones away when behind the wheel. If you are the driver, follow these steps for a safe drive:

- If you are expecting a text message or need to send one that cannot wait, pull over and park your car in a safe location before using your device.
- Ask your passenger to be your “designated texter.” Allow them access to your phone to respond to calls or messages.
- Do not engage in social media scrolling or messaging while driving.
- Cell phone use is habit-forming. Struggling to not text and drive? Activate your phone’s “Do Not Disturb” feature, silence notifications, or put your phone in the trunk, glove box, or back seat of your vehicle until you arrive at your destination.

Cell phone use while driving is dangerous and illegal. Break the cycle.

For more information, visit www.nhtsa.gov/campaign/distracted-driving and <https://drivewell.vermont.gov/distracted-driving/>.

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