April is National Distracted Driving Awareness Month

Distracted driving diverts a person’s attention away from the primary task of driving. All distractions endanger driver, passenger and bystander safety. The Kansas Department of Transportation would like to remind drivers about the facts regarding distracted driving and encourage them to be responsible while driving by avoiding it.

Get the facts
There are three types of distractions:

- Manual – taking your hands off the wheel.
- Visual – taking your eyes off the road.
- Cognitive – taking your mind off the task of driving.

But, because text messaging requires visual, manual and cognitive attention from the driver, it is by far the most alarming distraction. The best way to end distracted driving is to educate all Americans about the danger it poses. While the State of Kansas has a text-banning law that prohibits drivers from reading, writing or sending text messages and anyone caught texting will be fined, the safety of people on roadways can only be helped if people abide by the law.

The U.S. DOT site devoted to distracted driving, http://www.distraction.gov/, has a section called “Faces” with video stories of lives impacted by distracted drivers. Here are a few key facts and statistics from their site:
• In 2009, 5,474 people were killed in crashes involving driver distraction, and an estimated 448,000 were injured.
• 16 percent of fatal crashes in 2009 involved reports of distracted driving.
• 20 percent of injury crashes in 2009 involved reports of distracted driving.
• In the month of June 2011, more than 196 billion text messages were sent or received in the United States, up nearly 50 percent from June 2009.
• Teen drivers are more likely than other age groups to be involved in a fatal crash where distraction is reported. In 2009, 16 percent of teen drivers involved in a fatal crash were reported to have been distracted.
• 40 percent of all American teens say they have been in a car when the driver used a cell phone in a way that put people in danger.
• Drivers who use hand-held devices are four times more likely to get into crashes serious enough to injure themselves.
• Text messaging creates a crash risk 23 times worse than driving while not distracted.
• Sending or receiving a text takes a driver’s eyes from the road for an average of 4.6 seconds, which is equivalent to driving (at 55 mph) the length of an entire football field, blind.
• Headset cell phone use is not substantially safer than hand-held use.
• Using a cell phone while driving – whether it’s hand-held or hands-free – delays a driver’s reactions as much as having a blood alcohol concentration at the legal limit of .08 percent.
• Driving while using a cell phone reduces the amount of brain activity associated with driving by 37 percent.
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