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Distracted driving campaign aims to increase safety

TOPEKA, Kan. – Send a message by example, not from your phone. The Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) is reminding drivers to put down the phone and eliminate all distractions as part of the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration’s (NHTSA) distracted driving campaign.

The nationwide campaign runs through the month of April and is designed to curb the serious and deadly consequences of distracted driving. In Kansas, one in four vehicular crashes is caused by a distracted driver, according to KDOT. In fact, distracted driving has become a national epidemic, endangering passengers, adjacent vehicle occupants, motorcyclists, bicyclists and pedestrians.

“We want drivers to ditch the distractions and focus on their most important task – arriving safely to their destination,” said Secretary Julie Lorenz. “Texting, messaging and other forms of distracted driving put everyone at risk on the highways.”

In 2019, NHTSA statistics indicate that the number of deaths linked to driver distraction was 3,142 nationwide – almost 9% of all fatalities for that year. This represents a 10% increase over 2018 statistics and was the largest increase in causes of traffic deaths reported for 2019.

Distracted driving can take many forms including adjusting the radio, applying makeup, eating or chatting with passengers. However, the most common is texting and other forms of messaging – a behavior that has become increasingly dominant among young adults. This campaign reminds drivers that texting while driving is illegal and can result in a hefty fine, a tragic crash, injuries and death.

To avoid the temptation of using your phone while driving, KDOT encourages drivers to:

- Put your phone away when you get behind the wheel – if necessary, put it in the trunk, glove box or back seat.

- Do not check your social media, including scrolling or messaging, while driving.
- Activate your phone's "Do Not Disturb" feature.

The distracted driving campaign is funded by federal traffic safety funds administered by KDOT. For more information about distracted driving, visit the Kansas Traffic Safety Resource Office website at www.KTSRO.org.

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