



VISALIA POLICE DEPARTMENT

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*****NEWS RELEASE*****
March 28, 2018

TEN YEARS OF HANDS-FREE LAW: CHALLENGES REMAIN

Put Your Phone Down. Just Drive!

Visalia CA. – Drivers are using their cell phones less often while driving, 10 years after “hands-free” became the law, but distracted driving remains a serious safety challenge in California. Observing April as Distracted Driving Awareness Month and the first week in April as California Teen Safe Driving Week, safety advocates will focus on education and enforcement efforts statewide.

Visalia Police Department will join law enforcement throughout the state to step up enforcement along with awareness efforts by the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) to discourage distracted driving. Officers will have a special emphasis this month on enforcing all cell phone and distracted driving laws. The goal is to increase voluntary compliance by drivers, but sometimes citations are necessary for motorists to better understand the importance of driving distraction

April 5th and 13th have been designated as the two statewide enforcement dates when law enforcement agencies will step up distracted driving enforcement activities. The California Department of Transportation will put distracted driving messages on the changeable message signs on freeways during April.

Traffic officers have issued hundreds of thousands of citations over the past three years to those texting or calling on a hand-held cell phone. Recent legislation now makes it illegal to use your smartphone’s apps while driving. Still, everyone has seen other drivers on a device driving in a dangerous manner next to them during a commute or a trip around town.

Since 2011, OTS has conducted an observational study of handheld cell phone use every year. “This year’s study on the use of handheld cell phones and texting shows a decrease over past years; however, more work needs to be done to target those who were observed to still be breaking the law,” said OTS Director Rhonda Craft. “The best way to put an end to distracted driving is to educate all Californians about the danger it poses. We will do this through enforcement and education efforts like our new advertising campaign “Just Drive”, reminding drivers to put down their phones and focus on the road.”

“California’s distracted driving laws have been saving lives for a decade now,” said former State Senator Joe Simitian, who authored the state’s hands-free and no-texting laws. “Every day, somewhere in California, someone is sitting down to dinner with their family who wouldn’t have made it through the day without these laws on the books. That’s tremendously gratifying.”

Preliminary 2017 data also shows nearly 22,000 drivers were involved in distracted driving collisions in California, a decline from the more than 33,000 drivers involved in distracted driving collisions in 2007, the last full year before the hands-free law went into effect.



“Smart phones are part of everyone’s lives now. Texting, phone calls and posting on social media are nearly as addicting,” said Sgt. Mark Feller. “But doing these things can have deadly consequences while driving on our city’s streets. Changing these dangerous habits will help make our roadways safer for everyone.”

Visalia PD has the following Safety Tips:

- If you receive a text message or need to send one, pull over and park your car in a safe location, but ‘*never*’ on a freeway. Once you are safely off the road, it is safe to text.
- Designate your passenger as 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 can be habit-forming. Struggling to *not* text and drive? Put the cell phone in the trunk or back seat of your vehicle until you arrive at your final destination.

Visalia PD will be deploying extra traffic officers with grant-funded resources throughout the month in city locations with higher numbers of traffic collisions. Violators will be stopped and cited with fines starting at nearly \$200 for first time offenders. This campaign is funded by a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety, through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

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