



## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **Louisiana joins National Distracted Driving Awareness Month**

BATON ROUGE – Louisiana is joining a national effort during April to raise awareness of the growing problem of distracted driving, caused in part by the popularity of portable electronic devices.

The U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution declaring April as National Distracted Driving Awareness Month. Highway safety, law enforcement and other public agencies and private entities are participating in the program, which seeks to make motorists aware of the dangers of distracted driving.

Distracted driving covers a multitude of behaviors such as rubber necking, eating, drinking, talking to passengers, adjusting the vehicle's sound equipment, talking on a cell phone, texting and fiddling with a GPS. Drivers under the age of 20 are particularly susceptible to distractions because they are heavy users of cell phones and texting devices, and are often less experienced behind the wheel than older drivers.

The recent National Motor Vehicle Crash Causation Survey found that 80 percent of all traffic incidents and 65 percent of all near-crashes involve some type of distraction. Nationwide, driver distraction was reported to have been involved in 16 percent of all fatal crashes in 2008, which is an increase from 12 percent in 2004.

"The statistics point to distracted driving as a growing and deadly problem," said Lt. Col. John LeBlanc, executive director of the Louisiana Highway Safety Commission. "During April we want to remind everyone that when behind the wheel, their full attention should be on driving and not on talking on the phone, adjusting the vehicle's electronic devices, texting or other activities that distract them."

Louisiana law prohibits drivers from texting while driving, and drivers under the age of 17 are prohibited from using a cell phone unless it is to report an emergency. The maximum fine for texting while driving is \$175 for the first offense and \$500 for each offense after that. The fine doubles if the offending driver is involved in a crash while texting. The maximum fine for minors using a cell phone while driving is \$100 for the first offense and \$250 for each offense after that.

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