

# **MEDIA RELEASE**

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## **2020 AUGUST HANDS-FREE & DISTRACTED DRIVING CAMPAIGN: PRE-ENFORCEMENT NEWS RELEASE**

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### **CELEBRATE THE ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE HANDS-FREE CELL PHONE LAW BY REMINDING FRIENDS AND FAMILY TO DRIVE SMART**

*Extra Hands-Free and Distracted Driving Enforcement on Minnesota Roads Aug. 1-8*

Owatonna, Minn. — It's been a long year and motorists tend to slip back into old habits as time goes on. Twelve months ago Minnesota went to a hands-free cell phone law when behind the wheel. A year later, law enforcement reports seeing more and more drivers going back to their old ways.

To remind motorists about the law and to help educate the public on the importance of driving smart, the Owatonna Police Department, along with law enforcement agencies and traffic safety partners across Minnesota, will participate in [extra hands-free](#) and [distracted driving enforcement](#) and awareness beginning Aug. 1. The enforcement campaign, which runs through Aug. 8, is coordinated and funded by the Minnesota Department of Public Safety Office of Traffic Safety.

“Slipping back into old habits is easy,” said Owatonna Police Dept. Sergeant Jason Petterson. “While going back to some old habits might make you gain weight or go into debt, slipping back into manipulating your phone while driving could cost you your life. Re-commit to driving distraction-free by going hands-free with your cell phone. Together we can save lives.”

### **Hands-Free Cell Phone Law**

The Minnesota hands-free law went into effect on Aug. 1, 2019. State Patrol troopers and law enforcement officers throughout Minnesota have seen an increasing number of drivers using hands-free options such as mounts. However, some drivers cited say they know about the new law but are having a hard time breaking the habit or have been slipping back into old habits. Other drivers stopped have phone holders in the vehicle but aren't using them, or they think law enforcement isn't conducting traffic stops during the pandemic.

During the first 11 months of the [hands-free law](#), law enforcement cited 19,160 drivers for failing to comply with the law.

## Hands-Free Citations by Month Aug. 1, 2019-June 30, 2020

Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	Total
2,3113	2,730	1,651	1,480	1,549	1,822	2,281	1,649	866	1,163	1,656	19,160

**\*\*57 percent of all citations are from those 21 to 40-years-old**

### Distracted Driving Consequences

- **HANDS-FREE CELL PHONE LAW:** The new law allows a driver to use their cell phone to make calls, text, listen to music or podcasts and get directions, but only by voice commands or single-touch activation without holding the phone. Remember, hands-free is not necessarily distraction-free.
  - \$100 or more including court fees for a first offense.
  - \$300 or more including court fees for subsequent offenses.
- If you injure or kill someone while violating the hands-free law, you can face a felony charge of criminal vehicular operation or homicide.

### Drive Smart

[Driving smart](#) and focusing 100 percent of your attention on the road can help avoid tragedy for everyone sharing the road. Distracted driving-related crashes claim an average of 41 lives and 200 life-changing injuries each year, causing a lifetime of grief and pain for the families left behind and an untold story of what could have been.

Driving smart means setting your radio, streaming music or GPS before you start driving, keeping your eyes on the road during a conversation in the vehicle, not reaching down for an object on the floor, not eating messy food that could spill and take your attention off the road. All these activities behind the wheel are behaviors that could lead to a crash. You don't want to be that person who takes another life or your own. Drive smart by always paying attention behind the wheel.

### Distracted Driving is Dangerous Driving

- More than 50,000 crashes were distracted driving-related from 2015-2019, contributing to one in seven crashes in Minnesota.
- In 2019, distracted driving contributed to 3,279 injuries and 32 deaths.
- Distracted driving contributes to an average of 40 deaths and 195 life-changing injuries a year (2015 – 2019).
- Distracted driving contributes to one in five crashes in Minnesota.

Distracted Driving	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
<b>Fatalities</b>	72	41	24	29	32	198
<b>Serious Injuries</b>	173	254	218	179	149	973

### Drive Smart and Join Minnesotans Driving Distracted-Free

- **Cell phones** — Park the phone by putting it down, turning it off, placing it out of reach or going hands-free.
- **Music and other controls** — Pre-program radio stations and arrange music in an easy-to-access spot. Adjust mirrors and ventilation before traveling.
- **Navigation** — Map out the destination and enter the GPS route in advance.
- **Eating and drinking** — Avoid messy foods and secure drinks.
- **Children** — Teach children the importance of good behavior in a vehicle and model proper driving behavior.
- **Passengers** — **Speak up** to stop drivers from distracted driving behavior and offer to help with anything that takes the driver's attention off the road.