

# **MEDIA RELEASE**

**Owatonna Police Department  
204 East Pearl Street  
Owatonna, MN 55060**



**Keith E. Hiller  
CHIEF OF POLICE**

**For Further Information Contact**  
Sergeant, Jason Petterson

507-774-7223

---

## **2021 APRIL DISTRACTED DRIVING CAMPAIGN: PRE-ENFORCEMENT NEWS RELEASE**

---

**TOO MANY DRIVERS DISTRACTED BY OLD HABITS, SEND A DANGEROUS MESSAGE**

*Drive Smart: Extra Distracted Driving Enforcement on Minnesota Roads April 5-30*

Owatonna, Minn. —Most Minnesotans know that using phones behind the wheel is distracting and can lead to severe consequences on the road. But that’s not the only thing that is diverting attention away from driving.

Shaving. Putting on makeup. Fiddling with the touchscreen on your car stereo system. And even changing clothes. All of these can take your eyes off the road and ultimately cause you to crash.

With distracted driving still claiming lives and causing life-changing injuries in Minnesota, we all need a reminder about the dangers of not paying attention behind the wheel. That’s why Minnesota law enforcement agencies and traffic safety partners across the state will be participating in a four-week distracted driving extra enforcement and awareness campaign starting April 5.

The Owatonna Police Department will take part in extra enforcement that runs through April 30 and is coordinated by the Minnesota Department of Public Safety Office of Traffic Safety (DPS-OTS).

Driving smart and focusing 100 percent of your attention on the road can help avoid tragedy for everyone sharing the road. Distracted driving contributes to an average of 31 deaths and 192 life-changing injuries a year (2016-2020).

### **Distracted Driving is Dangerous Driving**

- More than 39,000 crashes were distracted driving-related from 2016-2020, contributing to one in nine crashes in Minnesota.
- In 2020, distracted driving contributed to 2,612 injuries and 29 deaths.
- Distracted driving contributes to 11 percent of crashes in Minnesota.

*Owatonna Police Department - Exceeding Expectations!*

Distracted Driving	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Fatalities	41	24	29	32	29	147
Serious Injuries	254	218	179	149	160	960

### Hands-Free is the Law

Hands-free cell phone use became law on Aug. 1, 2019 in Minnesota. That means drivers can no longer hold their phone in their hand. Accessing or posting on social media, streaming videos, checking that box score or Googling information on a device while driving are all still against the law in Minnesota, even in hands-free mode.

Law enforcement cited 19,778 drivers for failing to comply with the [hands-free law](#) in 2020.

### 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 a second and/or subsequent offense.
- 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 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.

###