

# **Texting while driving is nothing to LOL about**

Mary Browning, Community Education Specialist, Naperville Police June 28, 2011 11:00PM

On any given day, hundreds of people are breaking the law in the city of Naperville, and there is a good chance you come across one on a daily basis. The offense is texting and driving, and it's a growing epidemic across the nation.

Here in Illinois, it is illegal to text and drive. The statute prohibits more than just texting. A driver cannot, while operating a motor vehicle, compose, read or send an electronic message using a cell phone, personal digital assistant or a portable or mobile computer, yet many disregard the law resulting in dangerous and often deadly consequences. Texting while driving is part of a larger safety concern: distracted Driving. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, distracted driving is defined as “a specific type of inattention that occurs when drivers divert their attention away from the task of driving to focus on another activity instead.”

There are three types of distracted driving: visual, taking your eyes off the road; manual, taking your hands off the wheel; and cognitive, taking your mind off what you are doing. Using a cell phone, eating and drinking, reading, using a navigation system or GPS, or even changing a radio station, CD, or MP3 player is considered distracted driving. Although all distracted driving is dangerous, texting may be the most alarming because it involves all three types of distraction.

When motorists text and drive, their reaction time is decreased by 35 percent, and their steering capability decreases 91 percent, making them 23 times more likely to get into a car accident.

Add to the mix that drivers between ages 16 and 20, those already prone to crash even without texting, are the largest texting demographic, and you have a recipe for disaster. It's, therefore, not surprising drivers under the age of 20 have the highest proportion of distraction-related fatal crashes.

It is apparent, however, that drivers don't realize the dangers of driving while distracted. In 2009, 5,474 people were killed on U.S. roads and another 448,000 injured in motor vehicle crashes which involved distracted driving. So what can be done to safeguard ourselves and our loved ones from this public safety concern? Research shows that high visibility enforcement works because, incredulously, the fear of a citation and a significant fine outweighs the fear of being injured or killed in a crash.

However, enforcement, although effective, is only part of the answer. The Naperville Police Department strongly urges every driver to “put the phone down.” Be a role model yourself, and then ask your family, friends and coworkers to do the same. Prohibit your teens from talking or texting while driving and remind them that drivers under the age of 19 cannot legally use cell

phones while driving in the State of Illinois. Also, keep in mind yourself that no one, regardless of age, can text and drive in Illinois. It is considered a moving violation and subject to a fine.

The Naperville Police Department has also been actively using public information and education as another tool to reduce this risky behavior. In partnership with AAA Chicago, members of the police department have been helping teens realize the dangers of texting and driving through hands-on experience with a Distracted Driving Simulator at area high schools and special events. After using the simulator, many teens are surprised by the results as they find themselves swerving to avoid oncoming traffic or driving off the roadway. Many teens ran red lights or even hit pedestrians they didn't see while looking down at their phones. The simulator is an effective tool as it shows teens that although they may think otherwise, no one can safely text and drive.

If you would like to experience the AAA Distracted Driving Simulator or have a driver in your household realize the dangers of in car distractions, visit members of the Naperville Police Department at Ribfest on July 1, July 2 and July 3 from 11 a.m. to 6 at Knoch Park. Stop by even if you don't have time to drive the simulator and sign a pledge promising you will not text and drive. Your participation can help reverse the trend of distracted driving by heightening your sense of awareness and sharpening your driving skills.

Driving a vehicle and taking your eyes off the road to text or e-mail at any speed is dangerous. Getting caught with a phone in one hand could result in receiving a traffic ticket in the other, or the risk of being involved in a traffic crash. No one would "LOL" then.

Don't text and drive and always remember to buckle up. The life you save may be your own.