



News Release
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Distracted Driving Fatalities Down in Washington

OLYMPIA – Fatalities from distracted driving are down in Washington, reported the Washington Traffic Safety Commission (WTSC) during Distracted Driving Awareness Month, which traditionally begins in April. Recent data from WTSC show a decrease in distraction-related fatalities since 2017, when the Driving Under the Influence of Electronics Act (E-DUI) went into effect.

In 2016, the year before the law passed, 155 people died in crashes involving a distracted driver. In 2019, two years after the new law, 33 fewer distracted driving-related deaths occurred.

“Washington’s Distracted Driving law is working,” said Erika Mascorro, WTSC Program Manager, “The data shows that Washington culture around distracted driving is changing. With Washingtonians at home observing the governor’s Stay Home, Stay Healthy order, now is a good opportunity to review with the importance of being an attentive driver, so our families will be safer when we all return to the roads.”

WTSC conducted a [2019 statewide Traffic Safety Culture Survey](#)¹ and found that most Washingtonians are familiar with the distracted driving laws:

- Most (74 percent) know that using a hand-held cell phone while driving is illegal
- Most (68 percent) know that using a cell phone at a traffic light is illegal
- Most (69 percent) agree that using a hand-held cell phone while driving is dangerous

WTSC also estimates that Washington’s driver distraction rate was 6.8 percent in 2019, based on the [2019 Statewide Distracted Driving Observational Study](#). Cell phones remain the greatest source of distraction, with two of every three distracted drivers in Washington observed either using or talking on a hand-held phone. The observational study also found slightly more people distracted on city streets than county roads or state routes.

¹ <http://wtsc.wa.gov/download/11394/> The survey was distributed to 1,603 Washington state residents who are over 18 years old in September 2019.

“Most drivers in Washington are off their phones when they are on the road, and the numbers of attentive drivers have increased since the new law went into effect,” said Mascorro

“As we watch the culture change around phone use while driving, now is a good time to encourage drivers who have figured out how to keep their cell phones from distracting them to share their skills,” said Mascorro. The traffic safety culture survey showed that most Washingtonians (83 percent) reported encouraging a driver to put the phone down when they find themselves as a passenger with a distracted driver.

“There are steps everyone can take to encourage attentive driving,” Mascorro said. These steps include:

- Continue to set a good example by turning your cell phone off, putting it on “Do Not Disturb” mode, or giving it to a passenger while driving
- Encourage others to put their phone away while driving
- Talk to your family about and make rules about cell phone use and other distractions
- Avoid calling family members or friends when you know they are driving
- Emphasize cell phone use is also illegal when stopped at traffic signals and stop signs.

Mascorro said, “We’ve made progress in Washington, but we can each do more. Aim to have zero distracted drivers in your family.”

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The Washington Traffic Safety Commission (WTSC) is our state’s designated highway safety office. We share a vision with numerous other state and local public agencies. That vision is to reduce traffic fatalities and serious injuries to zero by 2030. The WTSC Director is the Governor’s Highway Safety Representative, which is a designated position each state is required to have in order to qualify for federal traffic safety funding.