

NHTSA Reminds Drivers to Avoid Distractions, Launches Distracted Driving Campaign

Distraction-related fatalities increased 12% from 3,154 in 2020 to 3,522 in 2021

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The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is kicking off its annual *U Drive. U Text. U Pay.* campaign, raising awareness of the dangers of driving while distracted. Together with Captain Ron Mead of the Washington State Patrol, Steve Kiefer of the Kiefer Foundation, and Torine Creppy of Safe Kids Worldwide, NHTSA Deputy Administrator Sophie Shulman previewed the [new campaign assets](#) for this year's campaign at the 41st annual [Lifesavers Conference](#).

NHTSA also released today a [new analysis of the 2021 fatal crash data](#) which underscores the risk of distracted and other forms of risky driving. Fatalities in distraction-affected crashes increased by 12% from 3,154 in 2020 to 3,522 in 2021, a total of 8.2% of all fatalities reported. A distraction-affected crash is any crash where a driver was identified as distracted at the time of the crash. Even with these high numbers, distraction is likely underreported because the behavior is difficult to detect during crash investigations, and police reports likely understate its incidence.

"These new data tell us just how much harm distracted driving can cause and why a nationwide campaign is more important today than ever," said Sophie Shulman, NHTSA's Deputy Administrator. "We need to use all the tools we have to reduce distracted driving: state laws, education and outreach, and disabling of phones while driving can all work to save lives."

When coupled with new data from NHTSA's "[The Economic and Societal Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2019](#)," the impact of distracted driving becomes even clearer. That report, which was released in February, estimated distraction by observing driver behavior in the real world. The study found that distraction was involved in 29% of all crashes, resulting in 10,546 fatalities, 1.3 million nonfatal injuries, and \$98.2 billion in economic costs in 2019.

NHTSA's campaign to address distracted driving takes place April 3-10. It targets drivers aged 18 to 34 who, according to NHTSA data, are more likely to die in distraction-affected crashes than any other age group. The *U Drive. U Text. U Pay.* campaign, now in its ninth year, is supported by a \$5 million national media buy in English and Spanish on television, radio and digital platforms.

In January 2022, the U.S. DOT released the federal government's comprehensive [National Roadway Safety Strategy](#), a roadmap to address the national crisis in traffic fatalities and serious injuries. In February, the Department launched the next phase of the NRSS, its [Call to Action campaign](#). The strategy adopts the safe system approach and builds multiple layers of protection with safer roads, safer people, safer vehicles, safer speeds, and better post-crash care. It is complemented by unprecedented safety funding included in President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

In addition to the distracted driving campaign, the Department has made progress on a number of roadway safety actions, including:

- Launched the National Roadway Safety Strategy, and recently initiated a stakeholder focused Call to Action, as well as released a one-year progress report and accompanying data visualizations that highlight the extent and magnitude of our roadway safety problem.

- Awarded over \$800 million in Safe Streets and Roads for All Discretionary Grant Program to 510 communities.
- Produced Vulnerable Road User Safety Assessment to guide states on required 2023 assessments.
- Issued the Complete Streets Report to Congress: Moving to a Complete Streets Design Model.
- Issued a final rule on rear impact guards.
- Continues advancing Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices rulemaking effort, analyzing and resolving the more than 25,000 public comments.
- Published an Advance Supplemental Notice of Proposed Rulemaking concerning speed limiters with a motor carrier-based approach.
- Released proposals for upgrades and a “road map” for the New Car Assessment Program – including developing a proposal to add a pedestrian protection program to NCAP.
- Made significant progress to advance pedestrian automatic emergency braking rulemaking.
- Issued a Standing General Order to collect more data about crashes that occur when automated driving systems and advanced driver assistance systems are engaged.

NHTSA’s final [2021 FARS traffic crash data and analysis is available online](#). The updated data confirms preliminary data that NHTSA released in 2022 that showed that traffic crashes increased 10.5% from 2020 to 2021. NHTSA expects to share preliminary traffic fatality data for 2022 in the coming weeks.

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