

U Drive. U Text. U Pay. Campaign Kickoff

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AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Good morning. I'm Sophie Shulman, the Deputy Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and I'd like to welcome you to today's kickoff for our national distracted driving prevention campaign.

Our annual *U Drive. U Text. U Pay.* campaign will hit airways today, reminding everyone that driving distracted puts their lives and the lives of those around them at risk of serious injury or even death.

Our \$5 million national paid media campaign includes two new TV ads that we will preview for you today. One's in English, and the other is in Spanish, because we want to spread this lifesaving message as widely as possible.

Today we're also releasing updated numbers that underscore the risk of distracted driving. According to police crash reports, fatalities in distraction-affected crashes increased by 12% in 2021, making these deaths 8.2% of all fatalities reported.

In 2021, we lost 3,522 friends, family members and neighbors to distracted driving. Their loss will have a lasting impact on those who knew and loved them.

However, we also know how difficult it is to detect distraction during crash investigations, and we know that police reports are likely to understate the incidence of distraction.

This is why NHTSA continues to approach the problem of distraction from many angles. We recently published a report titled "The Economic and Societal Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes." That report 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.

These numbers are staggering, and the agency is committed to eliminating this risky behavior from our roads.

This high-visibility enforcement campaign focuses on helping law enforcement officers' equitable efforts to prevent texting and distracted driving.

We know that strong laws coupled with fair and equitable enforcement not only help us change people's attitudes about safety risks; they help us change behavior.

Washington was the first state to ban texting behind the wheel, back in 2007. And as of today, Ohio joins the ranks of 24 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands that enforce a primary hand-held cell phone ban for all drivers at all times, except during emergencies.

NHTSA continues to engage in a variety of efforts to reduce all forms of distracted driving and associated crashes and injuries. This year, we plan to publish a comprehensive literature review that covers multiple aspects of distracted driving with a focus on electronic device use.

We're also working on human factors research to understand the relationship between distracted driving and technology, and the agency continues to focus on eliminating distraction inside the vehicle.

We continue to work with states to evaluate innovative distracted driving countermeasures. And of course, we provide grants to states so they can conduct effective highway safety programs.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law also initiated changes to the distracted driving grant program, making it easier for more states to qualify.

Their work – and all of our work – is urgent. Urgent, not only because of distracted driving, but other risky driving behaviors like speeding, impaired driving, and failure to wear a seat belt.

Motor vehicle traffic fatalities make up about 95% of all transportation-related deaths in this country. We are committed to improving safety for all road users – drivers and passengers, pedestrians, cyclists, children, motorcyclists, older Americans, and people with disabilities.

Traffic fatalities and the fatality rate declined consistently for 30 years, but progress has stalled over the last decade and went in the wrong direction in 2020 and 2021. Today, NHTSA is releasing our updated 2021 traffic fatality statistics.

In 2021, fatalities increased by 10%, with 42,939 lives lost on our nation's roads. This is the highest number since 2005 and the highest percentage increase since NHTSA's Fatality Analysis Reporting System began collecting data in 1975.

The fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled increased to 1.37, a 2.2% increase from what we saw in 2020. And fatalities increased in 43 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

The risky driving behaviors that increased in 2020 during the pandemic continued into 2021, with speeding, impaired, unbelted, and distracted fatalities all on the rise.

Vulnerable road users bear a heavy burden from distracted and other risky driving behaviors. Pedestrian fatalities increased 13% in 2021, and cyclist fatalities rose by 2%.

I want to take this opportunity to encourage all Americans to consider the lives of others while on the road and put an end to risky behavior behind the wheel, especially distracted driving. Remember, it only takes a moment to change your life forever.

Looking away from the road for even a second can have devastating consequences. Nothing's worth the risk. Put down the phone and just drive.

We hope everyone will make the smart choice to avoid distractions behind the wheel.

Distractions can come in many forms, whether it's your phone, other passengers, eating, or anything else that takes your mind and eyes off the road. Focus on what matters most – driving – and keep yourself and others on the road safe.

With that, we'll conclude today's news conference. Thank you so much and stay safe.