



## News Release

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### **Texting While Driving Increases Your Crash Risk Six Fold**

#### ***Governor Kaine Declares April 29th Distracted Driving Awareness Day***

**RICHMOND, VA (APRIL 27, 2008)** – AAA Mid-Atlantic, DRIVE SMART Virginia, DMV: The Virginia Highway Safety Office, and the Virginia State Police call on Virginians to take action on April 29, 2009 for Distracted Driving Awareness Day and make a pledge to pay attention while driving. The day was created to raise awareness among drivers about the dangers of driving while distracted and to encourage drivers to change their driving behavior. Pledge to drive distraction free by visiting <http://www.drivesmartva.org> and clicking on the red ‘Don’t Drive Distracted’ box to the right.

According to a Virginia Tech Transportation Institute (VTTI) study, nearly 80 percent of crashes and 65 percent of near-crashes involve driver inattention within three seconds of the crash.

“Due in part to the Tech study and other data, distracted driving is becoming recognized as a top danger behind the wheel, along with speeding and impaired driving,” said David Mitchell, Deputy Commissioner of DMV. “We strongly support Governor Tim Kaine’s initiatives to raise awareness about this danger, including the proclamation recognizing April 29, 2009 as Distracted Driving Awareness Day in Virginia.”

In addition, the Governor also took the important step of signing into law a bill that will prohibit text messaging behind the wheel. This law takes effect on July 1, 2009.

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## **DISTRACTED DRIVING AWARENESS DAY, PAGE 2 OF 4**

“DRIVE SMART Virginia created this day of awareness to help people recognize the danger they put themselves in when they drive distracted. A person who would never consider drinking and driving may not hesitate to text while driving, which has been shown to be as dangerous,” said Janet Brooking, Executive Director of DRIVE SMART Virginia. “We believe that once people understand the danger of taking their eyes and/or mind off of the task of driving, they will work to change their bad habits behind the wheel.”

Distracted driving includes activities such as personal grooming, eating, reaching for items in the car, and talking and texting on a cell phone. A University of Utah study shows that a person talking on a cell phone is four times more likely to get into a crash than someone driving without distraction from the phone. For someone texting when driving, the likelihood is six times higher.

“Although driving seems like second nature, it’s still a skill that requires constant, complex coordination between your mind and body. Unfortunately, a moment’s lapse in attention can have tragic consequences, so you should always keep your mind on the task at hand,” stated Martha M. Meade, Manager of Public and Government Affairs for AAA Mid-Atlantic. “AAA is committed to educating drivers on the full range of distractions that can lead to crashes, from adjusting the radio or attending to children, to eating and drinking or using a mobile phone. All distractions place the driver, passengers and others on the road at risk.”

### **Consider the following:**

- Distracted driving may be defined as anything that takes your eyes and/or mind off of the road.
- There is no difference in the cognitive distraction between hand-held and hands-free devices. (Simulator studies at the U. of Utah.)
- The Wireless Association reports 270 million cell phone subscribers. A Nationwide Insurance public opinion poll showed 81 percent of the public admit to talking on a cell phone while driving, which translates to estimates of more than 200 million people using cell phones while driving.
- The annual cost of crashes caused by cell phone use is estimated to be \$43 billion (Harvard Center for Risk Analysis).
- Talking to a passenger while driving is significantly safer than talking on a cell phone. (University of Utah)
- While over 90 percent of teen drivers say they don’t drink and drive, nine out of ten say they’ve seen passengers distracting the driver, or drivers using cell phones. (National Teen Driver Survey)

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## **DISTRACTED DRIVING AWARENESS DAY, PAGE 3 OF 4**

- So, while studies show that drivers on mobile phones are more impaired than drivers that are legally intoxicated, apparently that message has not reached our teen population.
- A Harris Poll determined that 9 out of 10 American adults believe that sending text messages while driving is distracting, dangerous and should be outlawed.
- According to that same Harris Poll, 57 percent of those surveyed admitted to sending text messages while driving. In the age group of 18 to 34, that number rose to 72 percent.
- More than 1 trillion text messages were sent worldwide last year. More than 75 billion messages were sent in June 2008 alone, which is a 160 percent increase over the prior year. (International Association for the Wireless Telecommunications Industry)
- As of June 2008, 85 percent of the American population had a wireless device. (International Association for the Wireless Telecommunications Industry)

“Multi-tasking has become such a daily part of our lives that many people don’t think about the risks to themselves and others when it’s done behind the wheel,” said Colonel W. Steven Flaherty, Virginia State Police Superintendent. “It only takes a few seconds to change a CD, grab a drink, dial a cell phone, crash your vehicle and change a life forever.”

### **Top Ten Tips to Minimize Your Distracted Driving:**

**CHANGE YOUR WAYS** and recognize the activities that distract you, such as eating, conversing on the phone, or changing a CD. Once you recognize these distractions, you can work to eliminate them.

**MAKE A PLAN.** Know your route in advance and make sure that you have a good understanding of your directions. Check weather and road conditions. If you are transporting children, make sure that they are all properly buckled up and that you have items to keep them occupied, such as books on tape or soft toys.

**MANAGE YOUR TIME** so that you do not have to multi-task or drive aggressively on the road.

**DON’T LET YOUR DRIVE TIME BECOME YOUR DOWN TIME.** Understand that driving is not your “down time” or a time to catch up on phone calls, personal grooming, or dining.

**SCAN** the roadway to make sure that you are aware of others on the road at all times. Be prepared for the unpredictability of others.

**CONCENTRATE** on your driving. Make sure that you are not upset or tired when getting on the road. This is not the time to have a serious or emotional conversation with your passengers.

**PULL OVER** if you need to do something that will take your eyes and/or mind off the road. Make sure that you find a safe place to pull over first.

**REDUCE THE USE!** Use technology sensibly.

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## **DISTRACTED DRIVING AWARENESS DAY, PAGE 4 OF 4**

**TAKE A REFRESHER CLASS!** Everyone can pick up bad habits through the years. A driver improvement class can raise your awareness and help you assess your driving behaviors.

**BUCKLE UP, EVERY TRIP, EVERY TIME.** Making sure that everyone is properly buckled up is the best defense against distracted drivers.

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*DRIVE SMART Virginia coordinated the 2009 Distracted Driving Day in Virginia. Safety Partners include: AAA Mid-Atlantic, AAA Tidewater, Albemarle-Charlottesville Regional Jail, Alexandria Fire Department, Alfa Insurance, Allstate Insurance, Amelia County High School, American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE), Colonial Virginia, American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE), Greater Tidewater, American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE), Northern Virginia, American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE), Star Valley, Annandale High School, Appalachian Agency for Senior Citizens, Appalachian Power, Arlington District Office of Child Support, Atlee High School, Augusta County Service Authority, Bayside High School, BikeWalk Virginia, Blackstone Police Department, Bluefield Police Department, Bluelinx Corporation, Bristol Virginia Police Department, Brunswick County Public Schools, CD Hylton High School, Centreville High School, Cintas Corporation, City of Danville Police Department, City of Fairfax, City of Hampton Public Works, City of Martinsville, City of Newport News, City of Norfolk, City of Petersburg, City of Portsmouth, City of Richmond, Claytor Lake State Park, CNA Insurance, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Court of Appeals of Virginia, Dan River ASAP, Dan River High School, Deep Creek High School, Delta Airlines, Denbigh High School, Department of Environmental Quality, Department of Health Professions, DMV: The Virginia Highway Safety Office, Dominion High School, Douthat State Park, Drive Safe Hampton Roads, DRIVE SMART Virginia, DuPont, Elizabeth Arden, Enterprise Rent-A-Car, Erie Insurance Group, Ervinton High School, Farmers Insurance Group, Federal Highway Administration, Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, First Baptist Church Campostella, Frito lay, Froehling and Robertson, Front Royal Police Department, Frontier Culture Museum of Virginia, Gate City Police Department, GEICO, Goodwill Industries of the Valleys, Grundy High School, Halifax Police Department, Hampton/NASA Steam Plant, Hanover County High School, Harrisonburg Police Department, Heritage High School, Horizon Milling, I&O Medical Centers, Jacobs Engineering/Virginia, James Madison High School, James River State Park, JD Miles and Sons, KE Coughtan High School, Kellam High School, Kenbridge Construction Company, Kettle Run High School, Kollmorgen A Danaher Motion Company, Kraft Foods, Lee Hy Paving, Liberty High School, Liberty Mutual Insurance, Marine Chemist Service, Marion Senior High School, Mary D. Pretlow Anchor Branch Library, Mohawk Industries, Motor Vehicle Dealer Board, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Nationwide Insurance, Naval Safety Center, New River Trail State Park, Newport News Police Department, Norfolk Academy, Norfolk Public Schools, Northern Virginia Training Center, Northumberland High School, Old Dominion University, Patrick Henry Community College, Petersburg Area Transit, Piedmont Virginia Community College, Poms and Associates, Portsmouth Police Department, Potomac Falls High School, Powhatan County Public School, Progress Printing, Progressive Insurance Group, Property Casualty Insurers Association of America, Purcellville Police Department, Richmond Area Bicycle Association, Richmond City Fire and EMS, Richmond City Public Schools, Roanoke Police Department, Robert E. Lee High School, Rockingham Group, Scott County Magistrate, Shenandoah County Public Schools, Shenandoah's Pride Dairy, Stafford County, State Compensation Board, State Farm Insurance, Staunton River High School, TC Williams High School, The Frazier Quarry, Thomas Nelson Community College, Timberville Police Department, Town of Abingdon, Town of Dayton, Town of Orange Police, Town of Purcellville, Transportation Safety Training Center at VCU, Tread Corporation, Truck Enterprises, Tunstall High School, United States Postal Service, USAA Educational Foundation, USS Carl Vinson, VAMAC, Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police, Virginia Automobile Dealers Association, Virginia Beach Police Department, Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Virginia Department of General Services, Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, Virginia Department of Labor and Industry, Virginia Department of Taxation, Virginia Department of Transportation, Virginia Department of Veterans Services, Virginia Farm Bureau, Virginia Health Information, CODES, Virginia Megaprojects Information Center, Virginia Racing Commission, Virginia State Police, Virginia Tobacco Settlement Foundation, Virginia Western Community College, VML Insurance Programs, Walker Manufacturing/Tennaco, Warm Hearth Village, Warren County High School, Warwick Plumbing and Heating, Western Albemarle High School, Western State Hospital, Winchester Police Department, Woodbridge Senior High School, Youth of Virginia Speak Out*