

## **Distracted Driving in Nebraska**

Driving requires mental, physical, visual and auditory attention. Doing anything but concentrating on driving puts drivers, passengers and other road users at an increased risk of being involved in a crash. Each day in the United States, approximately 8 people are killed and more than 1,000 injured in crashes that are reported to involve a distracted driver.<sup>4</sup>

Forty eight states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Virgin Islands have instituted an all driver texting ban. All but three states have primary enforcement. Nebraska is one of those three states that have secondary enforcement for driver texting.<sup>1</sup> Twenty-two states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Virgin Islands, have laws that prohibit all drivers from using hand-held devices while driving; Nebraska has no such law.<sup>1</sup>

### **Nebraska Distracted Driving Statistics**

- In 2019, there were 19 fatalities, 1,495 injuries and 3,060 property damage only crashes related to distracted driving in Nebraska.<sup>2</sup> Nationally, 2,841 people were killed in distracted driving crashes in 2018.<sup>3</sup>
- From 2010-2019, 40,946 crashes were caused by distracted driving behaviors (inattention, mobile phone use and other), leading to 14,018 injuries and 119 fatalities.<sup>2</sup>
- On average, 12 people are killed and 1,401 injured in 4,094 crashes each year due to distracted driving.<sup>2</sup>
- In 2019, 41 of the 134 traffic crashes involving cell phone distractions involved 41 teen drivers (31%) compared to all other aged drivers at 93 (69%).<sup>5</sup>
- Over the last 10 years, on average, Nebraska drivers aged 15-19 have been involved in 39 cellphone distraction crashes per year.<sup>6\*</sup>

\*Use of cell phone may be under reported due to law enforcement not being at the scene of the crash to identify it as such. May be recorded as inattention or other distraction.

### **How Does Distracted Driving Affect Nebraska?**

In 2019, there were more reported total distracted driving crashes (4,566) in Nebraska compared to 2018 (4,369). Distractions include mobile phone use, inattention and other distractions.<sup>2</sup> According to the Nebraska Department of Transportation, distracted driving accounted for approximately 12% of the total traffic crashes in Nebraska for 2019 compared to speeding which accounted for approximately 6%. The number of distracted driving related crashes in Nebraska has increased 32% over that past ten years and 2019 saw the highest fatal crashes with nineteen.<sup>2</sup> At the current trend, distracted driving would be nearly 15% of all crashes in ten years.

### **Strategies to Reduce Distracted Driving**

#### **Worksite Cell Phone Policy**

Motor vehicle crashes are the number one cause of work-related injury death.<sup>7</sup> Companies are addressing this by going beyond state laws to promote best driving practices such as required seat belt use and no cell phone use while driving. Case studies of companies with safe driving policies show that crash rates decline after the policies are implemented.<sup>8</sup>

### **Primary Enforcement**

Nebraska law prohibits the use of a handheld wireless device to read, write, or send communication while operating a motor vehicle. A driver who violates the texting law can be fined \$200 for first offense, \$300 second offense, or \$500 for subsequent offenses in addition to three points against the driver's license. Nebraska is one of three states enforcing texting while driving as a secondary offense, meaning the driver would not be cited for a violation unless they are charged with another violation or offense. Adjacent states like Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming and Iowa have a primary enforcement law against texting while driving.

Observations done in the District of Columbia, New York, and Connecticut (primary enforcement states) conducted up to seven years after bans were implemented showed the rates of driver hand-held cellphone conversations were an estimated 24-76% lower than would have been expected without a ban.<sup>9</sup> Driver behavior is very responsive to cellphone laws. Texting bans reduced visible texting while driving approximately 60%. Full hand-held device bans reduce the probability of talking on cellphones while driving around 40%.<sup>10</sup> Studies continue on the effects of primary enforcement on reducing crashes.

### **High Visibility Cell Phone and Text Messaging Enforcement**

Similar to the *Click It or Ticket* seat belt campaign, high-visibility enforcement along with paid and earned media are deployed annually around cell phone use and/or texting. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the program "*Phone in one hand. Ticket in the other.*" was piloted in two cities. Hand-held phone use in Hartford, CT and Syracuse, NY dropped by 32% and 52%, respectively. The percentage of drivers observed manipulating a phone either texting or dialing decreased as well.<sup>11</sup>

### **Education**

The [Drive Smart Nebraska Coalition](#) utilizes social media such as Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and Facebook to educate the public about distracted driving. Pre-made messaging which consists of billboards, posters, radio and theater ads are available and used by traffic safety advocates across the state. Teens in the Driver Seat, a peer-to-peer traffic safety program, in schools across Nebraska, educate about distracted driving through their schools and communities. Schools conducting the program have seen decreases in student reported texting and cell phone use while driving.<sup>12</sup>

Joel Feldman's EndDD.org program provides presentations to workplaces and schools about distracted driving. This evidence-based presentation is often provided through a volunteer network of the Association of Trial Attorneys across the country including Nebraska.

### **Cited Sources**

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- <sup>8</sup>National Safety Council. *Employers Safe Driving Kit*. Retrieved January 6, 2021. <https://www.nsc.org/road/safety-topics/distracted-driving/distracted-driving-for-employers>
- <sup>9</sup>Insurance Institute for Highway Safety Highway Loss Data Institute. *Distracted Driving Q&As*. Retrieved January 6, 2021. <http://www.iihs.org/iihs/topics/t/distracted-driving/qanda>
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- <sup>11</sup>National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. *Countermeasures That Work: A Highway Safety Countermeasures Guide for State Highway Safety Offices*. 9<sup>th</sup> Edition. Retrieved January 6, 2021. [https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.dot.gov/files/documents/812478\\_countermeasures-that-work-a-highway-safety-countermeasures-guide-.pdf](https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.dot.gov/files/documents/812478_countermeasures-that-work-a-highway-safety-countermeasures-guide-.pdf)
- <sup>12</sup>Teens in the Driver Seat Trend Report. Retrieved January 6, 2021. <http://dhhs.ne.gov/Documents/TDS%20Trend%20Report.pdf>

## Resources

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Injury Prevention & Control: *Motor Vehicle Safety*. [http://www.cdc.gov/Motorvehiclesafety/Distracted\\_Driving/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/Motorvehiclesafety/Distracted_Driving/index.html)
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