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Clover Connection

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Don't Cross the Line! - April is National Distracted Driving Awareness Month

Far too often we read in the newspaper that a car crossed the center line and ran into a vehicle traveling in the opposite direction. Most times this is caused by driver distraction, often when the driver is texting. Tragically, this recently happened here in Texas and resulted in 12 innocent people losing their lives. At 55 miles per hour, during the four to five seconds that it takes to send or read a text message, your car is traveling the length of a football field without a driver in control. During this time, the car can drift in and out of lanes as well as cross the center line.

Multi-tasking is thought of as a useful skill, but it gets a lot of people into trouble behind the wheel. Most of us incorrectly assure ourselves that we can multi-task and use the cellphone while we drive. After all, we can walk and chew gum at the same time, right? When we stop and think about those activities — chewing gum and walking — we must admit that walking is one of those things we do that requires very little brain power. In fact, it's subconscious and nearly automatic. Unlike walking and chewing gum, both driving and using a cell phone requires higher cognitive thinking. Your brain simply cannot perform two higher cognitive tasks at the same time. Instead, it must switch between tasks. With technology at our fingertips, drivers are constantly faced with distractions, such as talking or texting, which places their safety and that of others at serious risk.

Although cell phone use is not the only distraction in the car, it is one of the most common and is a leading cause of distracted driving traffic crashes and fatalities. Text messaging is particularly dangerous. Research conducted by the Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI) found that reaction times double when drivers are distracted by text messaging. Driving requires the use of our visual, manual, and cognitive abilities — texting takes away all three of these at one time. According to the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), in 2015 driver distractions killed 476 people and seriously injured an additional 3,104 people on Texas roadways. In 2015, there were 105,783 traffic crashes related to distraction, which is nearly a 5 percent increase from 2014. Distracted driving-related crashes are highest among younger drivers, ages 16 to 34.

April is National Distracted Driving Awareness Month — a time to raise awareness of the dangers associated with distracted driving and to encourage Texans to put down their cell phones

while driving. With more than 100,000 traffic crashes in Texas each year involving distracted driving, drivers are reminded that using a mobile phone when behind the wheel is a risky habit that they should break. In 2015, 38 percent of Texas drivers admitted to talking on their mobile phone while driving at least some of the time, according to a survey conducted by TTI, and more than 21 percent of drivers said they read or send text messages and emails when behind the wheel.

I want to remind drivers to put away their cell phones and wait until they arrive at their destination to use their phone. The goal of the campaign is to reduce distracted driving, not only for National Distracted Driving Awareness Month, but throughout the year. Although, cell phone use is the most easily recognized distraction, all in-vehicle distractions are unsafe and can cause crashes or fatalities. Keep your eyes on the road and arrive alive!

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