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Clover Connection

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The Myth of Multi-Tasking
April is National Distracted Driving Awareness Month

Multi-tasking is thought of as a useful skill, but it gets a lot of people in trouble behind the wheel. Most of us incorrectly assure ourselves that we can multi-task and use our 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.

In Texas, it is estimated that 1 in 5 traffic crashes are caused by distracted driving, and the problem is getting worse. As part of National Distracted Driving Awareness Month in April, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) is launching its “Talk, Text, Crash” campaign to remind drivers to stay focused on the road.

Last year, there were 108,962 distracted driving crashes in Texas — up 3 percent since 2015. Those crashes killed 452 people and seriously injured another 3,068. These crashes are highest among younger drivers ages 16 to 34.

According to TxDOT, 38 percent of Texas drivers say they regularly or sometimes use a cell phone while driving. Text messaging is particularly dangerous, as reaction times double when drivers read or send text messages. A driver texting at 55 mph will lose sight of the road for nearly five seconds, which is comparable to driving the length of a football field while blindfolded. During this time, the car can drift in and out of lanes as well as cross the center line.

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.

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.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Passenger Safety reminds 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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