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For Immediate Release

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TxDOT Launches *Talk. Text. Crash.* Campaign

In campaign's second year, Texas distracted driving crashes are down but the problem remains pervasive

AUSTIN—There's good news and bad news on distracted driving in Texas. Crashes and fatalities are down slightly, and that's good. But, distracted driving incidences still cause thousands of crashes each year, and most drivers believe that using an electronic device while driving doesn't affect performance.

April is National Distracted Driving Awareness Month, and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) joins its safety partners around the state to encourage drivers to refrain from engaging in non-driving activities while on the road, particularly cell phone use and texting. In its second year, TxDOT's *Talk. Text. Crash.* outreach campaign is designed to raise awareness of the consequences of distracted driving.

Despite increased awareness of distracted driving crashes, driver perception continues to be out of touch with reality when it comes to the impact of distractions on their ability to drive safely. In a recent National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) study, 54 percent of motorists said their driving was no different when talking on the phone. However, 2011 statistics show that more than 81,000 Texas crashes involved distraction in a vehicle, driver inattention or cell-phone use, and 361 of these crashes were fatal. Overall, nearly one in four crashes in Texas involves driver distraction.

"We're encouraged that the numbers are slightly lower, but distractions behind the wheel are still causing thousands of crashes each year," said Carol T. Rawson, TxDOT's traffic operations division director. "No text or phone call is worth your life or the life of anyone else."

Nationally, the percentage of drivers texting or visibly manipulating a hand-held device increased from .6 percent in 2009 to .9 percent in 2010. At the same time, the percentage of motorists holding cell phones to their ears while driving stood at 5 percent in 2010. This means that at a typical daylight moment in 2010, 660,000 vehicles were being driven by people using hand-held cell phones. And, teen drivers are more likely than other age groups to be involved in a fatal crash where distraction is reported. In 2009, 16 percent of teen drivers involved in a fatal crash were reported to have been distracted.

"The issue of distracted driving is widespread, and we are committed to educating Texans about the dangers of engaging in non-driving activities while on the roads," continued Rawson. "The *Talk. Text. Crash.* campaign gets right at one of the major distractions—cell phone use—and reminds motorists to focus on the number one priority when behind the wheel, and that's driving."

Throughout the month of April, TxDOT will run radio PSAs statewide that remind drivers to put away the phone. The campaign aims to educate motorists about the dangers of distracted driving. TxDOT will also share information on Twitter and Facebook.

Additionally, TxDOT will participate in the first Texas Distracted Driving Summit on April 26, 2012, in San Antonio, Texas. The summit is being presented by Texas-based USAA, a leading financial services provider for the military community and their families, in association with TxDOT and Shriners Hospitals for Children. It will bring together federal, state and local officials, law enforcement, traffic safety experts, physicians, businesses and others to increase awareness of the dangers of distracted driving and facilitate education and advocacy efforts that will help change behaviors and make Texas roads safer.

Although cell phone use is the most easily recognized distractions, all in-vehicle distractions are unsafe and can cause crashes or fatalities. TxDOT calls on all Texans to focus attention on the road and wait until arriving at the destination to conduct non-driving activities.

Additional information on distracted driving may be found at www.distraction.gov.

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For more information call TxDOT Media Relations at (512) 463-8700.

The Texas Department of Transportation

The Texas Department of Transportation is responsible for maintaining 80,000 miles of road and for supporting aviation, rail, and public transportation across the state. TxDOT and its 11,000 employees are committed to working with others to provide safe and reliable transportation solutions for Texas by maintaining a safe system, addressing congestion, connecting Texas communities, and being a Best in Class state agency. Find out more at www.txdot.gov. Fan us on Facebook www.facebook.com/txdot. Follow us on Twitter www.twitter.com/txdot.