

DON'T LET DISTRACTED DRIVING BECOME YOUR NIGHTMARE

Yeah, that's the text message we've been waiting for, let me text him right back. Oh no I've lost control, were going to crash..... 911 whats your emergency? I'd like to report a terrible crash on (any road in Florida), there are bodies everywhere send help quickly.

Sound familiar? June 2007 five young women in upstate New York, all recent high school graduates crash head on with an eighteen wheeler resulting in their untimely deaths. Evidence indicates that a cell phone belonging to the driver had sent and received text messages 38 seconds before the first 911 call reported the crash We will never know the truth, but do understand a young inexperienced driver lost control and was responsible for this preventable tragedy.

One can safely assume it's only a matter of time before events such as this become all too common. Text messaging has undoubtedly become one of the most dangerous forms of driver distraction. Sadly, young drivers are the most likely motor vehicle operators to be involved in fatal collisions while using electronic devices. Crashes remain the leading cause of death and long term disabilities for ages 3 - 34.

Season is here and our residents and visitors are returning. The increased traffic volume is noticeable daily. What better time to remind drivers how important it is to adopt the driving philosophy of *Stay Alert, Stay Focused, Stay Alive Just Drive !*

Nationwide Insurance surveyed 1200 Americans ages 18 to 60 in November 2006. Over 80% were multitaskers; 59% said they're not distracted drivers. The results prove otherwise; 82% adjust radio / CD, 73% talk on cell phones, 68% eat, 19% text message, 14% comfort children, 12% apply makeup. Others admit to shaving, reading, and even changing their clothes.

Vehicles today have become an extension of our living rooms. Automobile manufacturers continue to compound the problem adding components that are distractions. DVD players, GPS systems, CD players, satellite radio, laptop computers are just a few examples. Include the other causes of driver inattention you can easily understand why 8 out of 10 crashes or near collisions are a direct result of driver distraction.

A car going 68 mph can travel the 100 yards of a football field in three seconds, the same length of time as the typical distraction. The average reaction time is 1.5 seconds, so even in as little as one second, you can prevent 40 to 60 percent of rear end crashes. That's why we stress the importance of remembering: *awareness is the key to understanding how one second can change a life forever.*

Walt Seifert, Executive Director of the Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates (SABA) said it best when he wrote, " We aren't driven to distraction when we drive. We choose distraction. It's an irresponsible choice that endangers our fellow travelers and us. "

Florida is on track to join the five states that ban the use of handheld cell phones while driving (California, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Washington) along with Washington D.C. At least 16 states restrict cell phone use by young drivers. Senator Frederica Wilson, D, Miami Gardens, has prepared Senate Bill 266 which will be introduced in March 2008. Representative Ronald Brise, D, Miami Gardens is preparing the House Bill. So far there appears to be very little opposition in either the House or Senate.

The *Stay Alive Just Drive !* traffic safety campaign directly addresses driver education, one of three vital traffic safety components (education, engineering, and enforcement) Ultimately the person behind the wheel is in control and responsible for the safe and law abiding operation of the vehicle. Hopefully we were all taught the benefits of safe driving, so as a reminder, here is a list of driving tips and suggestions we should all practice;

- Buckle up (3 seconds that can save your life)
- Use your turn signals when changing lanes
- Don't follow too closely (1 car length for every 10 mph)
- Drive within 5 to 7 mph of the posted speed limit
- Stop for RED LIGHTS
- Use care in parking lots (especially while backing up)
- Be aware of bicyclists and pedestrians (Share the Road)
- Yield the way to emergency vehicles
- Don't talk or answer your cell phone while driving
- Leave your house 10 minutes earlier
- Most of all, Keep Your Eyes on the Road and Your Hands Upon the Wheel

Visit us on the web at : www.stayalivejustdrive.com

Jay Anderson is the Founder of the *Stay Alive Just Drive !* traffic safety program. He serves as a Fire Commissioner with the South Trail Fire District in Lee County.

