

Don't Drive Intoxicated, Don't Drive Intexticated

LIZ BUCKNER CROSS
COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT

The American Automobile Association's (AAA) distracted driving awareness campaign titled *Don't Drive Intoxicated, Don't Drive Intexticated* is a reminder that distracted can be as dangerous as driving drunk.

In a study done by AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety researchers found that even using a hands-free system or texting when you are stopped at a light can produce a 'hangover' effect where your mind stays distracted for up to 27 seconds after using smartphones or even voice to text systems in vehicles. April is National Distracted Driving Awareness Month: A time to raise

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awareness of the dangers associated with distracted driving.

Fortunately, when we look at the cars surrounding us each day in traffic, we do not see many drunk drivers. Yet, looking around and seeing a driver staring at their cell phone is all too common. Distracted driving is much more pervasive than drunk driving.

Since 1980 when Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) was founded, the organization has raised awareness about the dangers of impaired driving. Because of the efforts of MADD, it is no longer socially acceptable to drink and drive and fatalities from drunk driving have decreased significantly. However, the same standard does not yet apply to distracted driving. The message from this campaign seeks to equate the risk of distracted driving with drunk driving and make it no longer considered acceptable behavior to drive while being distracted by cell phones and other mobile devices.

Like drunk driving, distracted driving slows the driver's reaction time. Distracted driving additionally takes the driver's eyes off the road for as much as 4-5 seconds while they read or send a text message. At 55 miles per hour, this would be the equivalent of driving the length of a football field with a blindfold on.

According to the Texas Department of Transportation in 2020 Texas roadways saw nearly 1-in-5 crashes caused by a distracted driver in which 367 people died and 2,205 were seriously injured.

While teens and young drivers are more likely to be driving distracted, many of these drivers do not see texting as a risk. A National Highway Traffic Safety Administration survey found that 20% of drivers ages 18-20 said texting does not affect their driving, and nearly 30% of drivers ages 21-34 said texting has no impact.

Parents and caregivers need to be good role models and not have their children witness them drive distracted, just as they would not want to have their children see them driving impaired. Children are paying attention and parents have more influence over their teens than they may think.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension-Rusk County reminds drivers

to put away their cell phones and wait until they arrive at their destination to use their phones. The goal of National Distracted Driving Awareness Month is to reduce distracted driving all year

long. 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!