

Opinion: What Nevada's cell phone law means

By Washoe County Sheriff's Office

Nevada legislation aimed at decreasing the number of accidents caused by distracted driving will go into effect on Oct. 1.

"The goal of Nevada's new 'hand free' legislation is to save lives," Washoe County Assistant Sheriff Tim Kuzanek said.

According to information from AAA's Foundation for Traffic Safety, distracted driving, including the use of cell phones is one of the major contributors to automobile accidents. Statistics show that between 4,000 and 8,000 crashes related to distracted driving occur every day in the United States. In the course of a year, distracted driving such as cell phone use, eating or drinking while driving, or anything else that takes your mind and eyes off the road, contributes to as many as one half of the 6 million crashes reported annually in this country. A 2010 AAA study also showed that the majority of drivers (62 percent) feel that talking on a cell phone is a very serious threat to safety, but they do not always behave accordingly or believe that others share these views. In fact, nearly 70 percent of those surveyed admitted to talking on their phones and 24 percent said they read or sent text messages or emails while driving in the previous month.

Nevada's new texting law "makes it a crime for a person to manually type or enter text into a cellular telephone or other similar device, or to send or read data using any such device, while operating a motor vehicle. The law further prohibits a person from using such a device for voice communications unless the device is used with an accessory which allows the person to communicate without using his or her hands, with certain limited exceptions."

According to this legislation, drivers must use hands-free equipment in order to make or receive phone calls on cell phones or other wireless communications devices. Exceptions include emergency personnel, licensed amateur radio operators who are communicating certain public information, employees of public utilities who are responding to emergencies, or drivers who are reporting emergencies or responding to dangerous situations. GPS devices are not included in this legislation.

In accordance with the law, law enforcement will issue only warnings to violators from Oct. 1 through the end of 2011. Fines will be imposed beginning in 2012.

The Governors Highway Safety Association offers the following suggestions while driving:

- Turn it off. Turn off your phone or switch to silent mode before you get in the car.
- Spread the word. Set up a special message to tell callers that you are driving and you'll get back to them as soon as possible, or sign up for a service that offers this.
- Find a Safe Place. If you need to make a call, find a legal and safe place to pull over and park first.
- Use your passengers. Ask a passenger to make the call for you.
- X the Text. Don't ever text and drive, surf the web or read your email while driving. It is dangerous and against the law in most states.
- Prepare. Review maps and directions before you start to drive. If you need help when you are on the road, ask a passenger to help or pull over to a safe location to review the map/directions again.
- Secure your pets. Pets can be a big distraction in the

car. Always secure your pets properly before you start to drive.

- Keep the kids safe. Pull over to a safe location to address situations with your children in the car.
- Focus on the task at hand. Refrain from smoking, eating, drinking, reading, and any other activity that takes your mind and eyes off the road.