

Remarks prepared for
David Strickland, Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
For the
American Association of Orthopedic Surgeons,
Orthopedic Trauma Association, and the Auto
Alliance
“Decide To Drive” Public Service Campaign Press
Event
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Good morning. I'm delighted to join you for the launch of the "Decide to Drive" campaign. On behalf of Secretary LaHood and everyone at the Department of Transportation, I would like to thank American Association of Orthopedic Surgeons, Orthopedic Trauma Association, and the Auto Alliance for your leadership on this important safety issue.

Distracted driving can take many forms. It applies to anything that takes your eyes off the road, your hands off the steering wheel or interrupts your concentration while driving. But texting while driving is the "perfect storm of distraction." Texting while driving involves all three dangers: it takes your eyes off the road, your hands off the wheel, and your mind off of driving.

You simply cannot use a cell phone and be safe while you're driving. There is no phone call or text message that can't wait until you reach your destination.

In 2009, nearly 5,500 people died and nearly 500,000 more were injured on American roadways in crashes that

involved distracted driving. The true role of distraction in crashes is almost certainly higher because pre-crash distractions often leave no evidence for law enforcement officers or crash investigators to observe, and drivers are understandably reluctant to admit to being distracted following a crash.

The Department has taken the lead and engaged in an all-out assault on this problem. Under the leadership of Secretary LaHood, the Department has made distracted driving a major safety priority for the last two years – with special emphasis on preventing texting and talking on the phone.

We have developed a plan to aggressively address and reduce distraction-related crashes. We have come up with an integrated approach that includes research, laws, and High Visibility Enforcement to move us forward.

In April of last year, we launched a pilot distracted driving campaign with the tagline “Phone in One Hand,

Ticket in the Other” in Hartford, Connecticut and Syracuse, New York.

After the second of four planned waves of program implementation, we found hand-held cell phone use had dropped 56 percent in Hartford and 38 percent in Syracuse; and texting while driving had declined 68 percent in Hartford and 42 percent in Syracuse.

On the outreach side, the Department has created a website, distraction.gov, which acts as a national clearinghouse for information on Distracted Driving. It also makes the Department’s position on Distracted Driving clear, and it details DOT’s commitment to work across the spectrum with private and public entities as well as advocacy groups to eliminate this deadly practice.

Through the work of lots of people, legislators, safety advocacy groups like *Focus Driven*, the National Safety Council, and now Orthopedic Surgeons, we’ve had a lot of success in raising awareness about this dangerous epidemic – But, there’s still work to be done. As we

pursue efforts to combat distracted driving around the country, I'm touched by how many people have taken up this fight as their own. Lives are being saved every day, and more and more people are choosing to keep their eyes on the road – and off their phones. Our fight isn't close to finished, but I know we've got the momentum on our side.

On behalf of Secretary LaHood and the staff at NHTSA, I am delighted to support your efforts. I look forward to our working together to get the word out about the dangers of distraction. When we get behind the wheel of a vehicle, it is each of our personal responsibility to drive and only drive.

Thank you.

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