



Oregon

John A. Kitzhaber, M.D., Governor

Department of Transportation

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DATE: April 18, 2013
TO: House Judiciary Committee
FROM: Troy Costales, Administrator
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SUBJECT: House Bill 2790

INTRODUCTION

House Bill 2790 changes Oregon's violation of the offense of operating a motor vehicle while using mobile communication device.

DISCUSSION

Distracted driving is an activity that diverts a person's attention away from the primary task of driving. Because text messaging requires visual, manual, and cognitive attention from the driver, it is by far the most alarming distraction. When someone is driving 55 mph, 4.6 seconds of texting is like traveling the distance of a football field full of people while blindfolded. Even though a majority of Oregonians believe texting and hand-held cell phone use while driving is unsafe, some still choose to do so. Multiple research reports have found that distracted driving is extremely risky. For example, a Virginia Tech Transportation Institute study revealed that physically dialing a phone while driving increases the risk of a crash as much as six times. Texting is riskier still, increasing the collision risk by 23 times.

Across the United States in 2011, 3,331 people were killed in crashes involving a distracted driver, compared to 3,267 in 2010. An additional, 387,000 people were injured in motor vehicle crashes involving a distracted driver, compared to 416,000 injured in 2010.

Eleven percent of all drivers under the age of 20 involved in fatal crashes were reported as distracted at the time of the crash. This age group has the largest proportion of drivers who were distracted. (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration)

In Oregon from 2009 to 2011, nine people died in crashes involving a driver who was reportedly using a cell phone at the time of the crash and 673 people have been injured.

According to a recent department phone survey of Oregon drivers, over 70% know cell phones are a safety problem and that phoning and texting while driving are illegal. In spite of this, cell phone convictions in Oregon have steadily risen from an initial 40 in 2008 to 22,892 in 2012.

Since before the state's first cell phone law ODOT has used mass media to extend the message that phone conversations and texting while driving don't mix. ODOT has used television, radio, billboard, bus posters, brochures and more to convey the message.

SUMMARY

Passage of HB 2790 would result in increased penalties for Oregon drivers who choose to talk on the phone or text while driving.