



April is National Distracted Driving Awareness Month

National Distracted Driving Awareness Month was introduced as a resolution in 2011 by former Rep. Betsy Markey (D-CO) and passed by the U.S. House of Representatives in a 410-2 vote on March 23, 2010. The resolution mentions 9-year-old Erica Forney, who was struck and killed by a distracted driver in Fort Collins, CO, in November 2008. Erica's mother, Shelley Forney, is a founding board member of FocusDriven, an advocate group for cell-free driving.

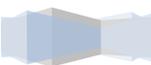
Throughout April, the National Safety Council (NSC) and FocusDriven will urge Americans to consider the lives of others on the road and stop using cell phones while driving. Both organizations take a firm stance on banning cell phone use behind the wheel, including hands-free devices and are asking organizations to help educate employees about the dangers of distracted driving. NSC estimates on traffic crashes due to cell phone use are even higher than the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. NSC estimates that 28 percent of all crashes – or 1.6 million crashes – each year are caused by drivers using their handheld or hands-free cell phones and texting while driving. This is much greater than the number of crashes caused by any other distraction.

The National Safety Council believes National Distracted Driving Awareness Month is the perfect opportunity for everyone to think twice before using a cell phone while driving. Cell phone use has grown dramatically over the past 15 years. In 1995, cell phone subscriptions covered only 13 percent of the U.S. population; by 2009, that had grown to 91 percent. Employers of individuals who use cell phone while in company vehicles especially need to implement or enhance cell phone policies to protect employees. NSC provides many resources, including a free cell phone policy kit, to help businesses get started.

Multitasking is valued in today's culture and our drive for increased productivity makes it tempting to use cell phones while behind the wheel. People often think they are effectively accomplishing two tasks at the same time. And yes, they may complete a phone conversation while they drive and arrive at their destination without incident, thus accomplishing two tasks during the same time frame. However, there are two truths to the common belief.

1. People actually did not "multitask."
2. People did not accomplish both tasks with optimal focus and effectiveness

Many people know texting while driving increases crash risk, the lack of understanding about the risks of phone conversation while driving remains a challenge. Talking on hands-free or handheld cell phones requires the brain to multitask – a process it cannot do safely while driving.



Both NSC and FocusDriven encourage drivers to commit to not using their cell phones while driving during the month of April and beyond. They suggest drivers silence, turn off or put their phones away in trunks or glove compartments, reducing the temptation to answer a ringing phone, text message or e-mail. Drivers also are asked to change their voicemail greeting to alert callers they may be driving.

For more information on distracted driving, contact Sharon Rateike, corporate wellness program coordinator at (920) 568-5475 or Sharon.Rateike@forthc.com.

