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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Cell Phone Distracted Driving Deaths Down Since Laws Enacted**

#### *Drivers Becoming Aware of Dangers and Penalties*

The California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) today announced deaths due to hand-held cell phone use by drivers have dropped since California enacted a ban on hand-held cell phone use while driving in July, 2008. The analysis, conducted by the Safe Transportation Research and Education Center (SafeTREC) at the University of California, Berkeley, showed that, when looking at state crash records two years before and two years after the hand-held ban went into effect, overall traffic deaths declined 22 percent while hand-held cell phone driver deaths went down 47 percent. Similar results were shown for hands-free cell phone use as well as injuries in both categories.

“These results suggest that the law banning hand-held cell phone use while driving had a positive impact on reducing traffic fatalities and injuries,” said Dr. David Ragland, Director of SafeTREC.

Contributing to the decline in cell phone deaths and injuries is an overall drop in cell phone usage while driving. A Statewide Intercept Opinion Survey commissioned with federal funds by OTS last summer showed 40 percent of California drivers reported they talk less (handheld and hands free) since enactment of the hand-held cell phone ban. In February 2010, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) reported similar results from their telephone survey which found that 44 percent of drivers in states with bans reported they don't use phones (hand-held or hands-free) when driving, compared with 30 percent in states without such laws. Further, IIHS observational research found that bans on hand-held phoning while driving can have big and long-term effects in curbing hand-held cell phone use.

“While we are thrilled to see that the hand-held ban in California has worked to reduce distracted driving crashes and overall cell phone use, there are still far too many drivers talking and texting while driving,” said Christopher J. Murphy, Director for the California Office of Traffic Safety.

“A good step for parents is to never call or text your kids if you think they might be driving.”

(more)

Cell phone usage while driving is top of the mind with California drivers, which they see as carrying a significant traffic safety threat. The same OTS statewide opinion survey reported that 62 percent of respondents stated that texting and talking are the biggest safety concerns on California roadways and 84 percent claimed cell phone conversations or texting while driving constitute the most serious distractions while driving.

Another clue to the reduction in crashes might be found in new information from the Department of Motor Vehicles that shows, statewide in 2011, there were 460,487 hand-held cell phone convictions – up 22 percent from 361,260 convictions in 2010 and 52 percent from 301,833 in 2009. The cost of a ticket for a first offense is at least \$159, and \$279 for subsequent offenses.

“Highly visible and publicized enforcement, along with the cooperation of the motoring public to reduce distractions behind the wheel, has played a significant role in the reduction in collisions,” said California Highway Patrol (CHP) Commissioner Joe Farrow. “In addition, there are many educational programs developed by the CHP, our allied agencies, as well as non-profit organizations such as Impact Teen Drivers that have made sustained efforts in reducing distracted driving.”

In April 2011, the Office of Traffic Safety using federal funds conducted the nation’s first statewide cell phone observational survey that showed nine percent of drivers were talking or texting while driving, representing hundreds of thousands of drivers at any given time. Research has shown that drivers who use hand-held devices are four times as likely to get into crashes serious enough to injure themselves.

The distracted driving section of the California Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) has developed the state’s “It’s Not Worth It!” public awareness campaign that employs TV, radio commercials, billboards, internet, social media and other outreach. In addition, millions of Californians see the “Handheld Cell Ticket - \$159 – It’s Not Worth It” message on more than 625 permanent changeable message signs for several days throughout the year. The SHSP’s distracted driving section is currently formulating plans to increase the data and research available to more accurately understand and combat the problem.

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