

# **“Drop it and Drive” During Distracted Driving Awareness Month**

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SPRINGFIELD – All distractions – whether texting, eating, or talking – can be dangerous when you’re behind the wheel. Throughout April, the Illinois Department of Transportation is teaming up with the Illinois State Police and more than 200 local law enforcement agencies to promote Distracted Driving Awareness Month, save lives, and make Illinois roads safer.

“Distracted driving is a serious issue that also is preventable,” said Cynthia Watters, IDOT’s bureau chief of Safety Programs and Engineering. “Plenty of people think they’

re excellent drivers and can multitask. Distractions behind the wheel jeopardize your safety, your passenger's safety, and the well-being of those around you when you shift your attention from the road."

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 26,004 people died in crashes nationwide involving a distracted driver between 2012 and 2019. While overall crash fatalities decreased slightly from 2018, distraction-related fatalities increased by 10%. The number of deaths linked to driver distraction reached 3,142 nationwide, accounting for nearly 9% of all crash fatalities in 2019. This represents a 10% increase since 2018. Distraction accounted for the largest increase in reported causes of fatalities in 2019.

Distracted driving continues to be a problem in Illinois and takes many forms. In 2020, 9,432 crashes on Illinois roads involved a distracted driver. In Illinois, it is illegal to operate a motor vehicle while using an electronic communication device to text or make a call unless using hands-free mode.

"We've all seen people trying to text and drive, or who are distracted by something else while on the road," said ISP Director Brendan F. Kelly. "Taking your eyes off the road for even a few seconds puts your life and the lives of others at risk. Distracted driving is unsafe and irresponsible, and the consequences can be deadly."

To keep your attention on the road where it belongs, remember these tips:

- If you need to send a text or check your phone, pull over and park your car in a safe location.
- Make a passenger your "designated texter." Let them use your phone to respond to calls or messages.
- Do not engage in social media scrolling or messaging while driving.
- Cellphone use can be habit-forming. Struggling to not text and drive? Put the cellphone in the trunk or back seat.

Using a mobile phone while driving is dangerous, but getting caught can also be expensive and embarrassing. Save your money and maybe even a life – wait until you reach your destination to text or call. Remember: Drop it and Drive!

The Illinois distracted driving safety campaign is administered by IDOT with federal traffic safety funds.