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## **States Boost Laws to Reduce Car Accidents for Distracted Driving Awareness Month**

As technology continually becomes an even larger part of our daily lives, car safety becomes an even more complicated issue. Distractions behind the wheel, including eating and talking to passengers, have always been a problem. But driving with a cell phone in the car makes it even easier to drive distracted and neglect the responsibility of paying attention to the road. But this April marks the second annual Distracted Driving Awareness Month, and states across the country are planning to crack down on drivers who fiddle with their cell phones or other electronic devices from the driver's seat.

Here in California, for example, 225 local police agencies have teamed up with the California Highway Patrol to establish 103 safety zones and a zero-tolerance policy for drunk drivers. Drivers caught breaking the state's strict anti-distraction laws will face a penalty that totals more than \$200 (after additional fees) for a first offense, and even more for repeat offenders. California State Senator Joe Simitian has proposed a law that would nearly double the fines for California distracted drivers; a change he says could prevent 700 car accident deaths each year.

Two other states boosting safety laws for Distracted Driving Awareness Month may come as a surprise: North Dakota and Texas. Until this month, North Dakota had one of the country's worst records on distracted driving enforcement. But the state's legislature recently passed a law that would fine drivers \$100 for texting while driving. And, as opposed to most state distracted driving laws, North Dakota's would be a primary offence, meaning the officer could stop any vehicle in which texting behind the wheel was evident.

The Texas Department of Transportation is coupling increased enforcement with a statewide safety awareness campaign aimed at humanizing the victims of distracted driving. This "Talk. Text. Crash." Campaign is dedicated to the memory of 12 Texas Drivers who have been killed in distracted driving car accidents. Friends and family members of these victims have teamed up with the Texas DOT to travel the state and discuss the dangers of distracted driving to Texans of all ages.

With about 6,000 people killed and 500,000 injured each year in distracted driving car accidents, the "deadly epidemic," as Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood calls it, is clearly not going away anytime soon. So while states boost their enforcement laws during Distracted Driving Awareness Month, do your part by putting down the phone while you drive all year long.

### **More Information:**

<http://www.gjel.com/news/state-driving-laws.html>

<http://www.gjel.com/blog/california-distracted-driving-awareness-month-stresses-enforcement.html>

<http://www.gjel.com/blog/distracted-driving-awareness-month-ignites-driver-safety-debate.html>

<http://www.gjel.com/blog/texas-north-dakota-join-california-to-reduce-distracted-driving-car-accidents.html>