

Lawyers Aim to Curb Distracted Driving

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The statistics are alarming: Every 24 seconds, a motor vehicle crash occurs involving a driver distracted by his or her cell phone. In 2010 alone, over 3,000 people were killed in distracted driving crashes; a large portion of those fatal crashes involved teen drivers. Recent studies suggest that a crash is 23 times more likely to occur when a driver is texting.

In response to this growing epidemic, the federal government has passed legislation to prevent certain forms of distracted driving. For instance, in 2009, President Obama signed an Executive Order prohibiting federal employees from texting while driving government-owned vehicles or privately-owned vehicles while engaged in government business. More recently, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) passed legislation banning commercial truck or bus drivers from texting while driving or using handheld cell phones while operating their vehicles.

Most states, including Illinois, have followed suit. In 2010, Illinois enacted legislation banning the use of cell phones while driving in school or construction zones. Last month, the Illinois House went a step further by passing a statewide ban on handheld cell phone use while driving. The bill, which now moves to the Senate, would only permit “hands free” cell phone use while operating a vehicle.

Legislation certainly plays an important part in curtailing dangerous behavior, such as distracted driving. However, there still remains a need to effectively communicate just how dangerous this behavior is to members of the public. Enter the trial lawyers.

Who better to understand and communicate the damage caused by distracted drivers than the attorneys who represent those catastrophically injured or killed as a result of such accidents? This month, in conjunction with National Distracted Driving Prevention Month, trial lawyers from across the country will speak at local high schools to raise student awareness of the dangers of distracted driving.

Over 750 trial lawyers have volunteered to speak in high schools across all 50 states. I’m proud to count myself as one of those lawyers.

The presentation given to the students – created by the non-profit organization “End Distracted Driving” – addresses the sobering statistics, gives real life stories, and offers simple recommendations to prevent accidents caused by distracted driving. The goal is to reach 100,000 students during the month of April. Thereafter, the organization plans to continue educating 250,000 students per year.

As iPhones and other “smart phones” become more prevalent and texting and social media (Twitter, Facebook, etc.) becomes the preferred form of communication – especially among the

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teenage population – the problem of distracted driving is likely to increase. Hopefully, this volunteer effort of trial lawyers will save lives and breed a new generation of drivers who think twice before engaging in behavior that distracts their attention from the road.

For more information about this initiative, including how to volunteer, visit EndDD.org.