

Louisiana Toughens Texting Ban

New law will help save lives

U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood commended Governor Bobby Jindal for signing a new law on Thursday, which makes texting while driving in Louisiana a primary offense beginning August 15, 2010.

“Innocent people should not lose their lives because someone chose to text while driving,” said Secretary LaHood. “That’s why I’m pleased Louisiana has passed a tough new law banning this irresponsible behavior. This sends a clear message: texting and driving don’t mix.”

This law strengthens Louisiana’s 2008 texting ban, which allowed law enforcement officials to ticket drivers caught using their phones only if they were pulled over for another offense. Drivers caught texting behind the wheel will continue to face a fine of \$175 for the first offense and up to \$500 for any that follow.

According to research by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), nearly 6,000 people died in 2008 in crashes involving a distracted or inattentive driver, and more than half a million were injured.

NHTSA has developed sample legislation that states can use to craft measures banning texting behind the wheel. The sample bill is patterned after President Obama's October 1, 2009, Executive Order prohibiting federal employees from texting while operating government-owned vehicles and equipment. Last year, more than 200 distracted driving bills were under consideration by state legislatures, and the pace has increased this year.

Recently, Secretary LaHood launched pilot programs in New York and Connecticut as part of a “Phone in One Hand. Ticket in the Other.” campaign to study whether increased enforcement and public awareness can reduce distracted driving behavior.