

DOT 53-10
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Contact: Karen Aldana
Tel.: 202-366-9550

Washington State Toughens Cell Phone and Texting Ban

U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood today commended Governor Christine Gregoire for signing a law that makes talking or texting on a cell-phone without a hands-free device a primary offense. This new law strengthens Washington's 2008 ban which allowed law enforcement officials to ticket drivers caught using their phones if they were pulled over for another offense.

"Texting while driving and talking on cell phones is a recipe for disaster on our nation's highways," said Secretary LaHood. "This new law will ensure innocent people do not lose their lives due to the negligence of irresponsible drivers,"

According to research by the National Highway Traffic 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.

In 2009, more than 200 distracted driving bills were considered by state legislatures and legislative activity is expected to remain strong in 2010.

On February 22, Secretary LaHood unveiled sample legislation developed by NHTSA to be used as a starting point for crafting new state laws to prohibit texting while behind-the-wheel.

The sample state law is patterned on the Executive Order issued by President Obama on October 1, 2009, directing federal employees not to engage in text messaging while driving government-owned vehicles or with government-owned equipment. Federal employees were required to comply with the ban starting on December 30, 2009.

Secretary LaHood announced the department's plan to pursue regulatory action to prohibit texting by drivers of commercial vehicles such as large trucks and busses at the Distracted Driving Summit he convened in September 2009. The department recently launched a federal website, distraction.gov, as a forum and information clearinghouse.

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A Message from Ray LaHood - Every single time someone takes their eyes or their focus off the road – even for just a few seconds – they put their lives and the lives of others in danger. [Distracted driving](http://distraction.gov) is unsafe, irresponsible and in a split second, its consequences can be devastating.

