



A Comprehensive Approach to Distracted Driving Enforcement

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National Distracted Driving Coalition (NDDC)

The **National Distracted Driving Coalition (NDDC)** was formed in March 2021 to address distracted driving which is a contributing factor to road deaths and injuries. This road safety issue is a priority concern shared by many organizations across many sectors. A diverse cross-section of entities, representing academia, non-profits, government, advocacy, and industry, including insurance, transportation, automotive and technology, have come together to create a National Action Plan to tackle this important issue.

Vision

To accelerate national efforts to implement effective interventions and encourage attentive driving by eliminating distractions.

Mission

To promote innovative and collaborative approaches to create a traffic safety culture of attentive drivers.

Disclaimer

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Introduction

Leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, the United States experienced notable declines in traffic enforcement across its jurisdictions, especially impaired driving enforcement. This trend stemmed from a combination of factors, including stagnating budgets, decreased manpower due to retirements, and a series of high-profile incidents involving the use of force against minority individuals which garnered widespread media attention. These events underscored the essential nature but also the complexities of traffic enforcement. This confluence of events also served to underscore the need for a more holistic approach to addressing distracted driving, based not only on enforcement but also a broader set of effective strategies to modify driver behavior and enhance overall road safety.

The FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program does not detail specific data about traffic enforcement activities, including impaired and distracted driving stops. However, data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) indicates that in 2020, 11,654 people were killed in motor vehicle crashes involving alcohol-impaired drivers, accounting for 30% of all traffic-related deaths in the United States. This represented a 14.3% increase compared to 2019 (NHTSA, 2023).

Similarly, distracted driving-related fatalities reveal concerning trends. In 2019, there were 3,142 fatalities attributed to distracted driving, which increased to 3,154 in 2020, and further to 3,522 in 2021, marking a 12% increase from 2020 to 2021. More concerning, a NHTSA report published in 2023, entitled *The Economic and Societal Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes*, re-examined 2019 crash data using a validated imputation model that compensated for under-reporting of distracted driving. With this model, NHTSA estimated distracted driving was a contributing factor in 12,405 traffic deaths, or 28 percent of all traffic deaths in the United States in 2019, costing society \$158 billion (Blincoe et al., 2023).



These increases in impaired driving fatalities due to alcohol and distraction suggest a potential correlation with reduced traffic enforcement during that period. These trends also highlight the importance of measuring the impacts of enforcement activities to understand their success.

Even where enforcement activities are effective, enforcement agencies must have the resources to perform them. For example, the Ohio State Highway Patrol reported a shortage of personnel, employing 1,300 active law enforcement officers despite an authorized strength of 1,650 officers. Similarly, in Massachusetts, there was only a 4% increase in enforcement activities, but there remained a significant decrease in comparison to previous years, which observed increases of up to 400% (MA State Police, 2025). These statistics underscore the challenges faced by law enforcement agencies in preventing road risks and the potential consequences of reduced enforcement on public safety.

The COVID-19 pandemic further and significantly hindered police enforcement due to physical distancing mandates and the substantial risks faced by officers and emergency first responders interacting with the public daily. Between the onset of COVID-19 and October 2021, the Officer Down Memorial Page reported that 454 law enforcement officers in the United States died as a result of COVID-19, making it the leading cause of line-of-duty deaths during that period (Boydston & Wells, 2023).

In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on policing practices, particularly in terms of traffic enforcement. A survey conducted by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) in collaboration with the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy at George Mason University (Lum et al., 2020) reported that more than 50% of the more than 1,000 responding law enforcement agencies to their survey (Wave 2) implemented policies that explicitly reduced proactive enforcement, including traffic enforcement. This reduction was observed between March and May 2020 when the survey was conducted, highlighting the widespread operational changes initiated in response to the pandemic.

These findings align with trends observed by the Virginia Alcohol Safety Action Program (VASAP), which reported an estimated 20% decline in traffic enforcement even before the pandemic began. This reduction was exacerbated during the pandemic, with enforcement levels dropping by 40%. One key indicator of this decline was the decrease in the average number of participants enrolled in VASAP's impaired driving programs, suggesting fewer arrests and citations for driving under the influence (Coleman, 2021). Overall, the pandemic significantly altered traffic enforcement strategies across the country, contributing to changes in road safety dynamics and impacting trends in impaired and risky driving (Delavary et al., 2024).

These challenges highlight the need for a comprehensive approach to enforcement to address a problem as vast and prevalent as distracted driving. Such an approach must examine the many facets of enforcement that pertain to the problem. This includes the legislation and laws officers have the authority to enforce, enforcement strategies and tools used in the field, and, ultimately, how enforcement engages with the public to drive voluntary compliance. A primary emphasis on changing behavior is needed to inspire safer choices among drivers. At the same time, stakeholders must be provided with effective tools to implement a comprehensive approach to help ensure resources are allocated to prevent more crashes and save more lives.

Legislation

Enforcement of laws. Any efforts to address distracted driving through enforcement begins with the crafting of distracted driving laws. The language enshrined in legislation plays a crucial role in determining the effectiveness and efficiency of their enforcement. The content and the clarity with which a law is written directly affects the quality and quantity of training and resources available to officers and ultimately impacts the level of confidence and capacity of both agency leadership and officers applying these laws. Further, legislative language influences the tools officers are equipped with to identify distracted driving and take action to prevent it. Well-written legislation provides police with the appropriate authority and necessary support to ensure the consistent and fair application of the law.

In considering the content of distracted driving laws, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) identified key features that contributed to their effectiveness and the ability of police officers to reduce distracted driving (Reagan et al., 2023). Laws that specifically ban the use of handheld electronic devices while driving, such as texting and talking, have been proven to reduce distracted driving crashes (Rocco et al., 2016; Zhu et al., 2021; Flaherty et al., 2021). The IIHS emphasized that laws should clearly define the use of electronic devices while driving, explicitly stating which behaviors are prohibited and including provisions for hands-free devices when necessary. Additionally, laws should provide appropriate penalties for violations to deter drivers from engaging in distracted behaviors. For instance, some states have graduated fines for repeat violations or harsher penalties for drivers who cause a crash while distracted.

Further, the IIHS encouraged the use of comprehensive strategies that combine strong laws with enhanced public awareness campaigns and robust enforcement practices. Primary enforcement laws permit officers to stop drivers solely for using a handheld device and tend to be more effective than secondary laws which only permit officers to stop drivers if a primary violation has been observed in addition to the distracted driving violation. These elements, when carefully crafted and executed, can lead to a significant reduction in distracted driving incidents, improving overall road safety.



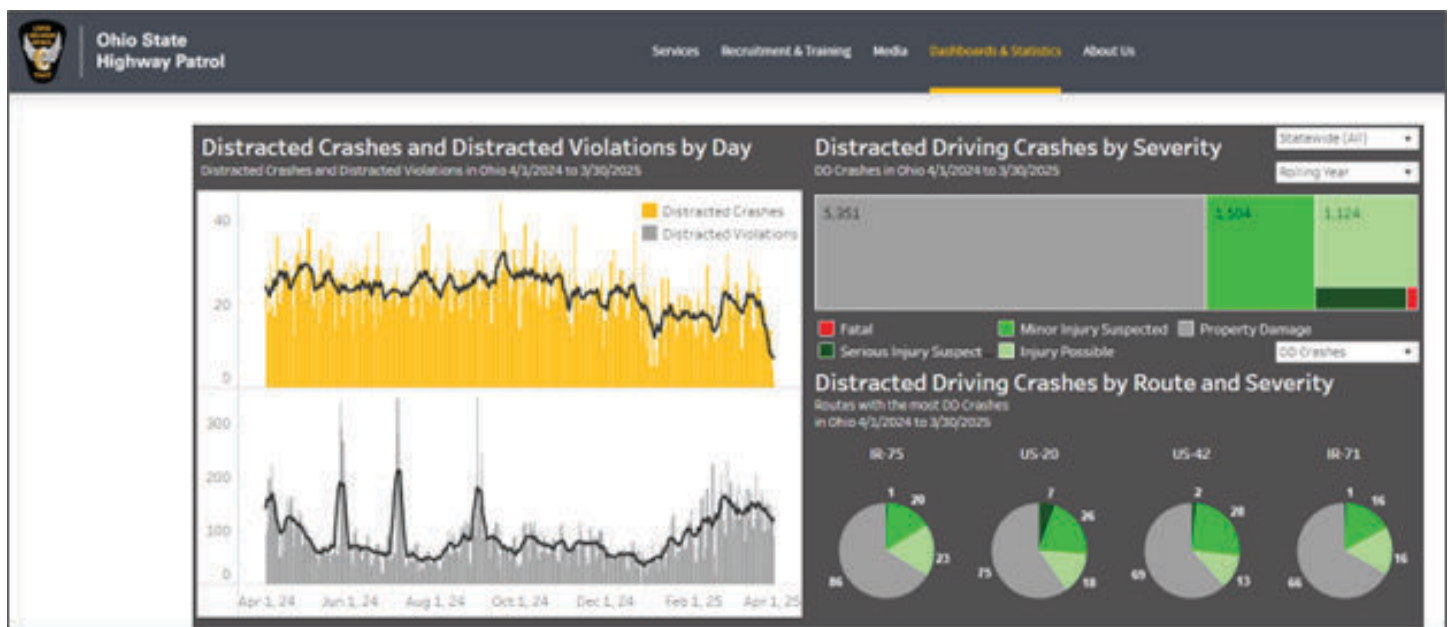
Maintaining primary laws, as opposed to secondary laws, plays a critical role in the effectiveness and enforceability of distracted driving laws. According to the Cambridge Mobile Telematics 2024 report, primary distracted driving laws were associated with increased enforcement and helped reduce distracted driving behaviors. In Ohio, distracted driving was previously a secondary offense, meaning drivers could only be cited for distraction if they were already stopped for another violation. However, a primary distracted driving law took effect in October 2023, allowing police to stop and cite drivers solely for using their phones or engaging in other distracted behaviors. Since the implementation of the primary law, the Ohio State Highway Patrol observed a remarkable 276% increase in distracted driving violations within the first six months of 2023, highlighting the significant impact primary enforcement laws can have in addressing this dangerous driving behavior. Moreover, between October 1, 2023, and September 30, 2024, the OSHP issued 24,967 violations (Kinn, 2025). In contrast Pennsylvania's law makes distracted driving a secondary offense, meaning officers must observe another violation before citing distracted driving, which limits enforcement opportunities. In the same timeframe, Pennsylvania State Police issued just 2,189 citations. This sharp contrast highlights how primary laws create more proactive enforcement, ultimately helping to improve road safety by allowing law enforcement to address distracted driving when it is observed alone.

Public compliance with laws. Clear and well-crafted legislation not only clarifies prohibited behaviors for the public but also fosters greater compliance, ultimately enhancing road safety. Promoting the law is crucial to its success, as public awareness about risks and penalties plays a key role in encouraging compliance. A comprehensive communications plan should address common questions, such as: What behaviors are considered distracting while driving? How will this law be enforced? and What are the penalties? This can be effectively achieved through press releases, signage, and community outreach, as demonstrated in Oro Valley, Arizona, described in detail below. Signage should inform the public about the presence of the law and its consequences. Additionally, a detailed communications plan can help keep the community engaged and informed.

Oro Valley, Arizona, has proactively addressed distracted driving through legislative action, public education, and targeted enforcement. In the absence of state law, Oro Valley's Police Chief promoted local enforcement through these strategies, setting an example for other regions. On January 6, 2017, the town enacted a hands-free ordinance, making it illegal for drivers to hold a cellular phone or other electronic device while operating a motor vehicle, including when stopped at red lights. To ensure the success of this ordinance, Oro Valley emphasized comprehensive public education and outreach. The Oro Valley Police Department (OVPD) engaged in community partnerships, distributing educational materials and utilized social media to inform residents about the dangers of distracted driving and the features of the new ordinance. This approach was aimed at fostering understanding and compliance within the community. The town's efforts highlight the importance of clear legislation, public education, and dedicated enforcement to address distracted driving. These strategies have increased awareness and promoted safer driving behaviors within the community.

In Ohio, the transition from a secondary to a primary distracted driving law, effective October 5, 2023, marked a significant shift in enforcement strategy. Before the primary law took effect, enforcement was minimal during the six-month warning period, as many drivers anticipated the change and continued to engage in distracted behaviors. However, once the law was fully enacted, the Ohio Department of Transportation (DOT) launched a targeted, holistic enforcement plan, focusing on six to eight key corridors with varying levels of intervention. This included installing signage to inform drivers about the new law, allowing for a before-and-after evaluation to gauge its impact. Alongside enforcement efforts, the state undertook a robust marketing campaign to promote the law and raise public awareness about the dangers of distracted driving. Early results have shown promising outcomes, with handheld phone use decreasing by 12% and hands-free use dropping by eight percent in the first six months of enforcement (Cambridge Mobile Telematics, 2023). The comprehensive approach (i.e., combining enforcement, education, and evaluation) was critical in refining the focus of the efforts and ensuring ongoing improvements in road safety. More importantly, this demonstrates the importance of data to inspire political leadership for the passage of distracted driving laws and to build buy-in at all levels.

Ohio State Highway Patrol Distracted Driving Dashboard



Tennessee has also made significant strides in combating distracted driving through legislative enhancements and innovative enforcement strategies. The state transitioned from a lenient approach to a stringent primary enforcement model with the enactment of the Hands-Free Tennessee law on July 1, 2019, which prohibited drivers from holding or supporting a phone with any part of their body while driving. To bolster this legislation, the Tennessee Highway Safety Office (THSO) launched Operation Hands-Free, an enforcement initiative utilizing public transit buses to identify and apprehend distracted drivers. This approach enabled law enforcement officers to observe violations from an elevated vantage point, making it easier to spot drivers using handheld devices. The campaign, conducted during *National Distracted Driving Awareness Month*, has been instrumental in raising awareness and reducing distracted driving incidents across the state.¹ These combined efforts underscored Tennessee's commitment to enhancing road safety by addressing the dangers of distracted driving through comprehensive legislation and proactive enforcement campaigns.

View the video: [Operation Hands-Free](#)

The effectiveness of distracted driving legislation ultimately depends on strong enforcement and public awareness. While implementing primary laws has proven to be a critical step in reducing distracted driving behaviors, enforcement efforts must be consistent and well-supported to ensure compliance. As seen in states like Ohio, Tennessee and Oro Valley, Arizona, targeted enforcement strategies, public education campaigns, and innovative initiatives such as transit-based monitoring have significantly contributed to behavior change. However, laws alone are not enough; without proper enforcement and continuous evaluation, their impact may be limited. A combination of strict legislation containing clear definitions, proactive policing, and public engagement is essential to making roads safer and reducing the risks associated with distracted driving.

¹ [TNTRAFFICSAFETY.ORG](https://tntrafficsafety.org)

Enforcement

Consistency & frequency. Traffic enforcement covers a wide range of risky driving behaviors, with speeding and impaired being primary topics due to their significant contributions to crashes. While data about distracted driving collisions suggests the problem is both substantial and likely underestimated, distracted driving laws often receive less attention from enforcement officials. Limited resources, staffing shortages, and competing priorities make it challenging for law enforcement to actively and consistently address distracted driving. As a result, it accounts for only a small proportion of overall traffic enforcement stops. For example, in Connecticut in 2022 approximately 5,200 crashes were linked to distracted driving, according to the **Connecticut Department of Transportation**. However, among the state's 107 police departments, only 7% of all traffic stops (21,934 stops) targeted distracted driving; this declined slightly to six percent in both 2023 (21,471 stops) and 2024 (24,788 stops) (Barone, 2025). It was estimated the average patrol officer in Connecticut made only four distracted driving stops in a year. Another issue is an overall decrease in traffic stops, not just those related to distracted driving. In 2022 Connecticut enforcement conducted a total of 313,346 traffic stops, representing a 39% decrease compared to 2019. The number of traffic stops for distracted driving was already disproportionately low compared to the prevalence of distraction-related crashes, and a decreasing rate of overall traffic enforcement only exacerbates this disparity. This highlights a major challenge law enforcement faces in increasing the enforcement of distracted driving laws.

Even if distracted driving enforcement is prioritized, there can be significant challenges associated with proving a driver was distracted to assess an infraction or establish distraction as a contributing factor in a crash. This is where clear and enforceable distracted driving laws can lead to actual changes in behaviors and improvements in safety. For instance, it is far easier for officers to prove a driver was holding a phone in their hand than to demonstrate how the driver was actively using the device, such as texting, filming, or browsing. Creating rules around behaviors that enforcement can quickly and clearly observe is a key to addressing the full scope of the distracted driving problem.



Crash investigations & forensic analysis. The prevalence of distracted driving in crashes is often underestimated because it can be difficult for law enforcement to definitively determine whether distraction was a factor in a collision. This challenge arises when there are no surviving victims, or when the at-fault driver does not admit to being distracted. Although at least some crash reports may offer an opportunity for police to identify distraction as a contributing factor, they may not record distraction without clear evidence, such as an admission from the driver, witness testimony, or visual indicators like the presence of a phone. Thus, crashes involving distraction as a contributing factor may go unrecorded if sufficient evidence to warrant closer investigation is lacking.

Although law enforcement continues to face significant challenges, including staffing shortages and competing priorities, ticket issuance remains relatively high, underscoring the ongoing pressure put on officers to enforce laws alongside other priorities. For example:

- In Ohio, with the implementation of distracted driving laws on October 5, 2023, 21,000 tickets were issued within the first six months, illustrating the state's active enforcement efforts.
- In Pennsylvania, approximately 18,000 citations for distracted driving were issued between 2017 and 2021, of which almost two-thirds were issued by the Pennsylvania State Police, and a significant proportion were issued to young people in their 20s (33%) and male drivers (59%).
 - Still, driver distraction was identified as the 9th most common reason for a reportable crash. While 71,979 crash investigations were completed by the Pennsylvania State Police in 2023, only 1,576 (.04%) of these crashes were identified as caused by a distracted driver. However, this number is likely underestimated because crashes may involve more than one contributing factor and identifying distraction as a cause is only possible if it is self-reported by the driver and/or observed by a credible witness or if multiple risk factors were present.
- In Tennessee in 2023,² a total of 19,941 convictions for hands-free violations were recorded by all police agencies across the state, with an additional 754 convictions for driving without due care.

At the same time, law enforcement agencies, particularly in states like Arizona, have reaffirmed their commitment to traffic enforcement, even as staffing numbers decline. In Arizona, despite recruitment difficulties, police agencies are prioritizing enforcing traffic laws, including those related to distracted driving, demonstrating that agencies remain determined to address this growing issue even when resources are stretched thin. These examples highlight the persistence of law enforcement in upholding traffic laws amid significant operational challenges, ensuring that public safety remains a top priority despite ongoing constraints.

Distracted driving is a pervasive yet often underreported factor in motor vehicle crashes, making thorough investigations critical to measure its true impact. For instance, Tennessee is leveraging crash investigations to identify the root causes of collisions and inform public education and awareness efforts. By thoroughly examining incidents in which law enforcement could not find obvious reasons for a driver to have left the roadway, investigators often uncover that distracted driving was a primary contributing factor. Recognizing the importance of accurate data collection, Tennessee has invited other jurisdictions to observe their investigative processes to enhance national efforts in combating distracted driving.

Despite the importance of identifying distraction as a factor, procuring necessary information for and conducting a forensic examination of a phone remains a significant challenge in this process. Officers often find it easier to investigate speeding, alcohol, or other violations, while distracted driving may be overlooked due to the complexities of digital evidence retrieval. This can lead to skewed data, similar to how early impaired driving investigations sometimes, and still today, fail to complete the investigation for drugs once alcohol is detected. To overcome this problem, detailed crash interviews are increasingly emphasized, ensuring investigators go beyond simply recording a driver's account of events and actively looking for evidence of distraction. Tennessee law enforcement agencies collaborate closely with local prosecutors to secure search warrants for phone records when distraction is suspected, ensuring adherence

² These cases could have been initiated before 2023 with only the conviction itself occurring in 2023.

to legal procedures and rules of evidence. Modern infotainment systems in vehicles also store valuable data that can provide insight into a driver's actions before a crash. Officers are trained to request specific data when applying for search warrants, ensuring they collect only the necessary evidence to build a strong case. By refining investigative techniques and emphasizing the role of forensic analysis, law enforcement can better detect and address distracted driving, ultimately improving road safety.

As such, investigative techniques must also evolve to address distracted driving-related crashes more effectively. Unlike speed or alcohol-related crashes, distraction can be harder to prove without a thorough investigation. Officers are encouraged to conduct detailed interviews, examine vehicle infotainment systems, and collaborate with prosecutors to obtain search warrants for phone records when necessary.

As an example of progress, Tennessee has integrated distracted driving crash investigations into its broader education and awareness strategy, ensuring findings help inform future prevention efforts. Strengthening forensic capabilities and standardizing investigative protocols across jurisdictions will be essential in holding distracted drivers accountable and refining law enforcement responses.

Officer training. A sometimes-overlooked component of distracted driving enforcement is training and workplace policies for law enforcement officers. Ensuring law enforcement officers are well-trained in distracted driving prevention is a critical component of traffic safety. In Tennessee, the Department of Safety and Homeland Security (DOSHS) has implemented a workplace policy (General Order #835) that strictly limits the use of mobile communication devices in department vehicles. Officers are prohibited from using a cell phone for any communication while driving unless using a hands-free device or responding to an exigent circumstance. Additionally, state-owned mobile communication devices cannot be used for personal business. At the Tennessee Law Enforcement Academy, cadets receive comprehensive training on distracted driving as part of their emergency vehicle operations and defensive driving courses. This training includes instruction about the cognitive effects of distraction, perception-reaction times, crash risks, and the prevalence of distraction-related collisions involving police vehicles. This education is crucial for officers to understand the dangers of distraction, both for the public and officers' own safety on the job. For agencies without established distracted driving training protocols, accreditation bodies such as the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) can help fill this gap by providing guidelines and best practices for officer training programs.

From a workplace safety perspective, law enforcement officers face unique risks due to the advanced technology they must at times use while driving. In-car computers, radios, mobile data terminals, and communication devices all require attention, increasing the likelihood of distraction. Unlike civilian drivers, officers must often multitask in high-pressure environments, further elevating their crash risk. The **IACP Distracted Driving Toolkit** emphasizes the need for policies that help officers balance their operational responsibilities with safe driving practices.

To improve officer safety, agencies should implement policies that limit non-essential device use while driving, encourage hands-free operation where possible, and promote training about managing and prioritizing in-vehicle distractions. Evaluating and refining these policies over time are equally essential to reduce distraction-related collisions among law enforcement personnel. By integrating comprehensive training, adopting evidence-based policies, and leveraging technology responsibly, law enforcement agencies can lead by example in the fight against distracted driving. Through a combination of education, enforcement, and technological innovation, both officers and the public can benefit from safer roads.

Agency leadership. Police chiefs play a crucial role in shaping an agency's priorities and ensuring traffic enforcement is adequately resourced and prioritized. The key objective of law enforcement agencies should not simply be issuing traffic citations but rather achieving voluntary compliance with traffic laws. To accomplish this, agencies are encouraged to develop zero-tolerance approaches for the most dangerous and risky behaviors, such as seatbelt non-compliance, impaired driving, and distracted driving. These pose significant risks to public safety, and a firm enforcement stance (i.e., in which officers issue citations for every observed violation) underscores the importance of compliance with these laws. Public awareness of these zero-tolerance policies can also serve as a deterrent, helping to modify behavior and gain compliance with the law.

To maximize efficiency and impact, agencies can integrate high-visibility enforcement with education and awareness campaigns. This can include initiatives such as the *Do Not Disturb While Driving* campaign, securing federal grant funding for enforcement operations, conducting saturation patrols for distracted driving, and participating in national campaigns following models like *Hands-Free and Click It or Ticket*. Targeting high-crash areas with strategic enforcement, setting up impaired driving checkpoints (where permitted), and leveraging social media and community engagement can further amplify the effectiveness of these efforts.

Additionally, young driver education is a critical component of enforcement and prevention. Agencies can work directly with high schools, especially in areas with high crash rates among young drivers, to educate students about the dangers of distracted and impaired driving. Utilizing interactive tools like pedal cars, roll-over simulators, impaired-driving goggles at community events, or more comprehensive programs such as **Ford's Driving Skills for Life** program can help reinforce these messages in a hands-on, impactful way. By integrating enforcement with education, law enforcement agencies can create a comprehensive approach to reduce dangerous driving behaviors and improve road safety.

Arizona law enforcement agencies have taken proactive steps to address traffic safety concerns despite being understaffed. In Pima County, the Sheriff's Office created a dedicated traffic enforcement unit of approximately 50 deputies. To enhance the visibility of their enforcement efforts, they regularly share outcomes with the media, keeping the public informed and reinforcing the deterrent effect of enforcement. This initiative was developed in response to Tucson's surge in traffic fatalities, particularly involving pedestrians and vehicles. By maintaining a strong media presence, law enforcement agencies can extend the impact of their enforcement beyond direct traffic stops and encourage safer driving behavior across the broader community. Other states have implemented similar strategies to counteract staffing shortages.

The Florida Highway Patrol (FHP), for instance, has implemented targeted recruitment efforts to fill vacancies, offering signing bonuses and relocation assistance to attract new officers. Similarly, Pennsylvania and other jurisdictions have attempted to increase recruitment by removing the college degree requirement for law enforcement applicants. This change aims to expand the hiring pool and address widespread shortages affecting many enforcement agencies nationwide.

Ohio has developed a Distracted Driving Dashboard, an interactive educational tool designed to inform the public and aid law enforcement in addressing distracted driving. The dashboard presents real-time data on distracted driving crashes and violations, making the risks more tangible and palpable for motorists. It also



educates the public about the three primary types of distracted driving (i.e., visual, manual, and cognitive) helping drivers understand how common distractions impair their ability to drive safely. Additionally, the Dashboard features dash camera footage from actual traffic stops involving distracted drivers, offering firsthand insight into the dangers of this behavior. By integrating education with enforcement, Ohio's approach ensures that distracted driving remains a top safety priority and reinforces the message that violations will not be taken lightly.

More generally, the Iowa State Patrol partnered with George Mason University to develop a place-based, proactive, problem-oriented strategy designed to enhance public perception of police presence to reduce traffic fatalities and injuries. This initiative specifically targeted rural roadways, where fatal crashes were more prevalent. By analyzing crash data, law enforcement identified hot towns communities where the trips of drivers who were involved in fatal crashes frequently originated. The program sought to intervene before crashes occurred by focusing on the locations where drivers were most likely to begin their journeys, such as bars, gas stations, and convenience stores. This community policing effort emphasized prevention rather than reaction, shifting the focus from post-crash enforcement to proactive safety engagement (Clary, 2019).

Troopers were engaged in highly visible interactions, spending 10-20 minutes at key locations to promote responsible decision-making. Officers provided safety messages on seatbelt use, impaired driving risks, and alternative transportation options to ensure drivers could get home safely. They also distributed educational materials detailing the factors that contribute to fatal crashes. These efforts were designed to be non-punitive, fostering positive interactions between law enforcement and community members while subtly reinforcing the presence of law enforcement. The unexpected nature of these interactions helped reinforce the idea that police were actively engaged in roadway safety. By making their presence visible yet approachable, the Iowa State Patrol improved public perception, encouraged safer driving behavior, and created a community-driven dialogue around traffic safety.

The Metro Nashville Police Department (MNPd) faced challenges with large numbers of motor vehicle crashes while working with limited enforcement resources. To develop a targeted strategy, the department conducted an in-depth crash data analysis, identifying key locations, times, severity, and contributing factors to collisions. However, they discovered gaps in their data and worked with the Highway Patrol to obtain additional insights, leading to a more accurate picture of crash trends. Based on this analysis, MNPd designed a high-visibility enforcement (HVE) campaign targeting a primary traffic corridor within the precinct, aiming to address behaviors most frequently linked to crashes (Williams, 2019).

The campaign involved deploying officers for two-hour periods before afternoon rush hour, twice a week, or once a month, to focus on high-risk driving behaviors rather than issuing a large volume of citations. After each operation, officers debriefed to discuss violations observed, citations issued, and potential improvements. This approach significantly reduced crashes in the target areas, even as citywide crashes rose. Data showed the effects of enforcement lasted for approximately three weeks before crash rates began increasing again, allowing police to optimize enforcement intervals. A cost-benefit analysis revealed that crash reductions provided substantial time savings, enabling officers to focus on other critical policing activities. This strategy was scalable to other hotspots and adaptable to rural areas with lower traffic volumes, where less frequent enforcement dosages may be sufficient to maintain safety gains.

Technology. New tools present new opportunities to combat distracted driving. In this regard, it can play a dual role in the fight against distracted driving by being either a major contributor to the problem or a key component of the solution.

With respect to solutions, although the U.S. has legal barriers to deploying automated enforcement cameras, other methods (such as public dashcam submissions and publicizing high-profile violations) can help shift behaviors. There are also new **distracted driving cameras**, designed with privacy and security in mind, which are starting to be pilot-tested in the US. Some jurisdictions are also using **mobile cameras** that can be moved to different locations as is the case of the District of Columbia which was awarded a grant to pilot test this technology throughout its high injury network and other locations.

Specific to enforcement agencies, the Safety Cloud system synchronizes with cruiser light bars to send real-time alerts to motorists about nearby officers, supporting Slow Down, Move Over laws. This is another tool that enhances both officer safety and driver awareness. There is also a range of other technologies, such as license plate readers, wrong-way detection cameras, and AI-powered distracted driving detection tools, which can further strengthen enforcement efforts. Cities like Washington, D.C., are leading the way in testing and deploying such tools, offering a model for other jurisdictions to follow.

Some new technologies are also helping officers conduct enforcement more efficiently. For example, some states have adopted unique enforcement tactics to catch distracted drivers in the act. Tennessee, for instance, utilizes marked vans and buses to observe violations from a higher vantage point, providing an effective method for detecting phone use in traffic, but also helping to make enforcement more efficient. Similarly, Minnesota is expanding its use of **elevated pickup trucks** with built-in cameras to identify motorists engaging in illegal phone use. These approaches highlight the importance of adapting enforcement techniques to overcome challenges in detecting distracted driving.

As technology evolves, it is essential to assess how various innovations impact driver attention, cognitive load, and overall road safety. This requires a clear understanding of the purpose and function of each technology, as well as its potential to either mitigate or exacerbate distraction. In this vein, the **Canadian Coalition on Distracted Driving (CCDD)**, formed under the auspices of the Traffic Injury Research Foundation, developed a **Technology Framework** which provides a structured approach for evaluating in-vehicle and mobile technologies with distraction in mind. This framework helps stakeholders, including policymakers, law enforcement, and industry leaders, determine which technologies may be beneficial in reducing distraction and which pose additional risks. Features such as hands-free controls, voice-activated systems, and automatic emergency braking, can enhance safety, compared to complex touchscreen interfaces or non-essential digital notifications which may divert drivers' attention from the road.

For a deeper understanding of how vehicle technologies influence driver distraction, resources such as the Technology Framework offer critical insights. This resource explores how properly designed technology can serve as an asset in preventing distraction-related crashes and provide guidance for law enforcement and policymakers on effectively implementing tech-based solutions. By carefully selecting and regulating the technologies introduced into vehicles, decision-makers can help ensure innovation supports, rather than undermines, road safety efforts.



Public Awareness & Engagement

Education designed to help the public understand the risks and consequences of distraction is another critical strategy to support and enhance the deterrence effect of laws and their enforcement. For laws to be effective, the public must not only be aware of them and their associated penalties, but also both perceive a strong likelihood of detection and face the real likelihood of detection.

Public awareness and engagement tools can take many forms. One strategy is to harness the power for telematics data which captures real-time driving behaviors. This data can be used immediately to provide feedback to the public about risks to drivers. As an example, partnering with an organization like Cambridge Mobile Telematics to capture telematics data created an opportunity for Ohio State Highway Patrol identify risks on the road. This motivated proactive enforcement of the new law and demonstrated the impact of enforcement on the roads. The OSHP used this data and developed a Distracted Driving Dashboard which became a valuable tool for illustrating pre- and post-legislation trends, showing how enforcement efforts correlated with reduced phone use as people shifted their behaviors to make safer choices. Such collaborations can help agencies refine their educational and enforcement strategies by analyzing behavioral shifts and reinforcing the necessity of continued enforcement. Additionally, recognizing officers for playing a role in reducing distracted driving violations can incentivize proactive enforcement and encourage sustained focus on this issue.

Another tool involves leveraging the media to raise awareness about risks and help positively influence driver behavior. **Research from Cambridge Mobile Telematics** has shown that media coverage significantly influences driver behavior, leading to measurable reductions in distraction. For example, high-visibility enforcement campaigns, in which press outlets are notified in advance and results are widely publicized, help reinforce perceptions that distracted driving laws are actively enforced; a key element of deterrence.



There is also considerable research which demonstrates what factors make educational campaigns effective. To maximize effectiveness achieving behavior change, campaigns should employ positive messaging, tap into positive emotions like humor, be personally relevant, and targeted to reach people as choices about behavior are being made in the moment. More importantly, messages should contain an element of self-efficacy, meaning safer and easier alternatives to the risky behavior must be perceived to be achievable, such as activating the Do Not Disturb feature or placing the phone out of reach (Robertson & Pashley, 2014).

Public education is central to reducing distracted driving, but traditional campaigns often fail to resonate with drivers who do not perceive themselves as at risk. Many believe distracted driving is a problem caused by others, not themselves, leading them to dismiss or ignore critical safety messages. To overcome this barrier, educational initiatives must focus on understanding the motivations behind distracted driving behaviors and tailoring messages to make the issue more personally relevant. Building a foundation for campaigns in research can help ensure that messaging strategies are evidence-based and effectively target at-risk groups

To this end, some agencies are adopting more personal approaches to education as research suggests harnessing an emotional and personally relevant or local example can be effective in changing behavior (Robertson & Pashley, 2014). In Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, police agencies are working to create a series of distracted driving facts in a quick reference sheet which can be used during traffic stops as a teachable moment. For example, officers can explain that taking your eyes off the road for three seconds at 65 MPH means traveling 285 feet, nearly the length of a football field, without looking at the road. Short, memorable, fact-based education shares impactful, easy-to-understand information that reinforces the dangers of distraction.

Using a slightly different approach, in Ohio, police officers are handing out cards during stops which contain victims' stories to personalize the consequences of dangerous driving behaviors. Visual storytelling can help humanize the consequences of risky behaviors, making them more tangible for drivers. In this way, officers can leverage teachable moments and increase awareness about how choices matter and avoid the more negative *blame and shame* strategies. Additionally, incorporating distracted driving simulators at schools, workplaces, and community events can provide hands-on experience that reinforces the risks associated with inattention behind the wheel.

Partnerships & Coordination

Combining approaches to build a comprehensive distracted driving prevention strategy can also help to use resources efficiently to amplify the results of initiatives. It has long been established that there are benefits associated with combining educational campaigns with high-visibility enforcement. Partnerships between law enforcement, advocacy organizations and the press can help increase awareness by sharing knowledge about risks in tandem with identifying and publicizing targeted enforcement efforts in areas with high crash statistics. For example, a study by Cambridge Mobile Telematics showed media coverage significantly influenced driver behavior, contributing to a 4.5% reduction in distracted driving in the US in 2023, preventing an estimated 55,000 crashes and 250 fatalities (CMT, 2024). This underscores the importance of leveraging partnerships such as combining enforcement with strategic media engagement to reinforce the consequences of distracted driving.

Another approach to combining education and enforcement involves applying targeted behavior change programs to distracted driving offenders in the form of driver improvement courses. In Tennessee, a general driver improvement course is available that removes penalty points for repeat offenders but includes a focused section on distracted driving. A slightly different model was utilized by Restorative Justice Victoria (British Columbia), the Victoria Police Department, and the Traffic Injury Research Foundation's award-winning Drop It And Drive® program. It was used to deliver a customized, interactive workshop to offenders charged with their first distracted driving offense. Results of the two pilot studies conducted 18 months apart at two different locations showed increased knowledge and sustained behavior change at three, six and 12-month follow-ups. Notably, 100% of participants agreed the pilot program can help reduce distracted driving and just one case of distracted driving recidivism occurred among the 71 participants in both pilots. Findings from this distracted driving offender pilot program demonstrated new avenues to integrate education with corrective action, ensuring those with repeated violations receive targeted interventions to change their habits.

A multi-faceted public education strategy that combines data-driven messaging, high-visibility enforcement, victim advocacy, interactive learning tools, and targeted intervention programs can help shift perceptions and reduce distracted driving. By making safety messages more personal and relatable, engaging the media to amplify awareness, and incorporating hands-on learning experiences, law enforcement agencies, and safety advocates can work together to create lasting behavioral change.

Conclusions

By leveraging technology, data, innovative enforcement tactics, public education, and enhanced crash investigations, law enforcement agencies have numerous opportunities to make a lasting impact on distracted driving prevention. A coordinated, evidence-based approach which combines clear legislation, enforcement driven by data and technology, and education and public engagement will be key to reducing crashes, saving lives, and fostering safer driving behaviors nationwide.



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