



Title: **Distracted driving a menace that must be targeted quickly**
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OUR VIEW

Distracted driving a menace that must be targeted quickly

Law enforcement authorities have a suggestion for those accustomed to cruising down the road with one hand on the wheel and another thumbing through their cellphone: Put it down and concentrate on driving.

Although police are always on watch for those who violate the state's distracted driving rules, they will be making it a mission next week.

Groups such as the Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police were able to get the governor to proclaim April 24-28 as Illinois Distracted Driving Awareness Week, and both chambers of the Legislature have added their support.

Police hope it makes a difference. With the backing of AAA, Illinois State Police, the National Safety Council, the Illinois Insurance Association and others, about 300 law enforcement agencies across the state will use the week to bring attention to the dangers of distracted driving and what can happen to those who choose to ignore the laws.

In the first-ever campaign against the growing problem, the groups hope to educate motorists and enforce rules designed to keep the roads safer for all travelers.

It's a serious matter that is widely ignored, even though those doing things like reading emails or sending texts while driving say they know better.

Unfortunately, the problem threatens to grow worse unless it can be stemmed early and older drivers are able to impart the message through their own safe driving habits. Young drivers — those under age 24 — are among the most

worrisome because they are still developing practices that will carry on for years.

Adults, though, don't seem to be getting it. Even though a vast majority acknowledge that distracted driving is dangerous — eight of 10 drivers say it is not appropriate to send or receive texts or emails while driving — they haven't stopped. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration studies show more than a third do it anyway.

The agency is concerned that attitudes are changing, too, and such habits will become less ostracized. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety's Culture Index shows that in just two years, the number of people who consider driving and texting a problem has dropped from 96 percent to 77 percent.

It is a problem, and it is dangerous. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said the number of people who died in 2015 in accidents involving distracted drivers jumped 9 percent to 3,477. The same agency said about 391,000 were injured in crashes attributed to the same reason that year.

Driving is a serious responsibility. Motorists owe it to themselves and to others on the road who could have to pay the cost of their actions to concentrate on the road.

The latest text, email or social media post can wait a few minutes.

Safetyserve.com is offering a short online course on distracted driving free during Illinois Distracted Driving Awareness Week. To take part, go to www.iddaw.org.