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Drivers need to make good choices

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Face it – every time you get behind the wheel, you’re about to encounter potential dangers over which you have no control. Traffic. Weather. Other drivers. They can all affect whether you get there safely – and all you can do is react to them as best you can.

But there are other risks that you, the driver, can take control of and eliminate. You have choices, and one of the most important is the choice you make to focus on the road and ignore the distractions competing for your attention. The Illinois Insurance Association (IIA) is partnering with law enforcement and community leaders in April to observe Distracted Driving Month.

We’ve joined this effort because we know the devastating consequences of driving while distracted; 3,744 lives lost and 391,000 injuries in 2015 alone were attributed to crashes caused by distracted driving.

You may have heard that when you read or type an average text on the highway, you're driving the length of a football field without looking at the road or the cars around you. But texting isn't the only dangerous distraction. Eating, adjusting the radio, setting your GPS or talking to passengers can just as easily impair your focus.

A Texas A&M study found that voice-to-text is not significantly safer than manual texting, and AAA's Foundation for Traffic Safety discovered that reaction times slow and brain function is compromised even when drivers use hands-free technologies to accomplish tasks such as responding to emails.

The bottom line is that when you're driving, you have only one job that matters – getting to your destination safely. Everything else can wait.

IIA believes decreasing the death toll will require greater public awareness and consistent law enforcement. We also know the best line of defense is the good choices drivers like you can make every day.

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