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Pay attention behind wheel

Losing concentration behind the steering wheel contributes to thousands of crashes each year. These incidents cause property damage, injury and sometimes death. Driving distractions put vehicle operators, passengers, pedestrians, construction workers,and emergency responders at risk.

April is Distracted Driving Awareness Month, a national campaign to bring attention to this serious, pervasive problem. The Illinois Insurance Association and its member companies encourage drivers to minimize distractions whenever possible.

Cellphones are an obvious distraction, but there are countless others. Road signs, billboards, crash scenes, construction zones, landscape vistas and GPS mapping are visual distractions. Manual distractions include eating, drinking, adjusting controls, reaching for an object, or grooming behind the steering wheel. Any activity that causes the driver to lose concentration is a cognitive distraction.

Most vehicles are equipped with hands-free cellphone technology these days. Still, this advancement does not eliminate visual, manual and cognitive distractions inherent in cellphone use. Set up an auto-response to let callers know you cannot talk while driving. Never text, email or record video behind the steering wheel.

In addition, program GPS and adjust temperature controls, music selection and mirrors before leaving home. Organize essentials for the trip ahead. Insist that all passengers wear seat belts. Securely strap children into car seats. Crate pets for transportation. Avoid eating, drinking, grooming and smoking while driving.

Your driving habits directly impact traffic safety. Keep eyes on the road, hands on the wheel, and focus on driving in April — and throughout the year!

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