

Administration takes aim at distracted driving

Drivers reluctant to put down mobile devices despite safety risks

WASHINGTON—Driving while distracted is a growing peril in a country where drivers are reluctant to put down cell phones and handheld devices even behind the wheel, the Obama administration declared. Officials said Congress and the American public must team up to reduce the danger.

Opening a two-day meeting to find ways to reduce drivers' use of mobile devices, the Transportation Department reported that nearly 6,000 people were killed and a half-million were injured last year in vehicle crashes connected to driver distraction. That includes drivers talking on cell phones and texting.

"To put it plainly, distracted driving is a menace to society," Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said.

The meeting gathered experts to examine the potentially deadly mix of driving with cell phones, mobile devices, and other distractions that divert attention from the road. LaHood said he would offer recommendations on Oct. 1 that could lead to new

restrictions on the use of the devices behind the wheel.

While the meeting focused on drivers using cell phones and mobile devices, participants noted that distractions could include reaching into the back seat, applying makeup or eating.

"I have nightmares about the last moments of my mother's life," said Greg Zaffke of Chicago, whose mother, Anita, was killed in May when a vehicle rear-ended her motorcycle at 50 mph (80 kph). The driver had been painting her finger nails at the time of the crash.

Congress is watching the issue closely. Sen. Charles Schumer and other Democrats are pushing legislation that would require states to ban texting or e-mailing while operating a moving vehicle or lose 25 percent of their annual federal highway funding.

LaHood said the government would draw lessons from past efforts to reduce drunken driving and encourage motorists to wear seat belts, urging a "combination of strong laws, tough enforcement and ongoing public education."

The government reported that 5,870 people were killed and 515,000 were injured last year in crashes where at least one form of driver distraction was reported. Driver distraction was involved in 16 percent of all fatal crashes in 2008 and prevalent among many young drivers.

Eighteen states and the federal enclave of Washington have passed laws making texting while driving illegal and seven states and the District have banned driving while talking on a hand-held cell phone, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. Many safety groups have urged a nationwide ban on texting and on using hand-held mobile devices while behind the wheel.

Researchers grappled with the question of whether using a hands-free device was safer than using a hand-held phone behind the wheel. One researcher cautioned that hands-free devices could still cause distractions if the driver needed to dial the phone or handle the device. (AP)

Drop off points across the US for donations to Typhoon Ondoy victims

NEW YORK
NAFCON (Nat'l Alliance for Filipino Concerns)/SANDIWA Nat'l Alliance of Fil-Am Youth are now receiving relief donations (clothes, blankets, medical supplies, monetary). NY drop-off @ BAYANIHAN Filipino Community Center, 40-21 69th St. Woodside, NY 11377. Call (516)901-1832 or email sandiwa.national@gmail.com if you would like to help.

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Checks can be made out to "Lakasdiwa," a non-profit organization that will send the funds directly to MIGRANTE International in the Philippines, a workers' organization directly helping the victims in the disaster relief efforts. Please put "Typhoon Ondoy Relief" on the check's note.

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San Francisco, CA 94112

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Daly City, CA 94014

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Thursdays 3:30-6:00

Asian Pacific Islander Youth Promoting Advocacy & Leadership
Attn: Armael Malinis, AnakBayan-East Bay
310 8th Street, Suite 215
Oakland, CA 94710

Stanford's Pilipino American Student Union (PASU) is also collecting donations to be sent to the Philippines to help victims of Typhoon Ondoy (international name Ketsana). If you would like to make a donation, please contact AV David at avhavid@stanford.edu or (650) 491-4561. ■

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