



WASHINGTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Sheriff Fred Newman

MEDIA RELEASE

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**Washington County Sheriff's Office Supports Distracted Driving Awareness Month
*Buckle Up, Phone Down***

April is Distracted Driving Awareness Month, and the Washington County Virginia Sheriff's Office joins DRIVE SMART Virginia in spotlighting this very important issue. We call on all drivers in Washington County to avoid any distraction when they're driving. "With the number of people I see focused on a phone and not on the road, it is apparent that distracted driving has really turned into a serious problem," said Sheriff Fred Newman. "I worry about traffic safety everyday and I wonder when people will begin to realize the true dangers of distracted driving."

"We work all year to educate Virginia drivers on the dangers of distracted driving," said Janet Brooking, Executive Director of DRIVE SMART Virginia. "During April, we work to reach local businesses, state agencies, schools, municipalities and community leaders to help us spread the word that distracted driving affects us all." According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), in the U.S. in 2011, 3,331 people were killed in crashes caused by a distracted driver, a 2% increase over 2010. Take a look at these Virginia statistics:

2012:

- 107,240 traffic crashes in Virginia (11% decrease)**
- 58,547 people were injured in crashes on Virginia roadways (7% decrease)**
- 773 people died in crashes in Virginia (DMV, preliminary 1% increase)**
- 80% of crashes and 65% of near crashes are caused by distracted driving**

So many of us think it is all right to send a quick text while waiting at a stoplight, or read an email from a friend. We think those actions are okay because it only takes a few seconds. Did you know an average text takes nearly 5 seconds, which means your eyes are off the road for the entire length of a football field? Just talking on your cell phone is distracting. According to NHTSA, cell phone users are 18% slower to take action when seeing brake lights.

“All drivers need to do is to turn their phone off when they’re driving, or hand their phone to a passenger,” said Brooking. “Motorists need to realize they can’t multi-task behind the wheel,” said Sheriff Fred Newman. “When you’re driving, paying attention to the road is your job and your responsibility. If you can’t turn the phone off, then put it in the glove compartment or out of reach. That’s the best solution. We would like to see fewer drivers using a phone when they’re driving.”

Distracted driving isn’t limited to your cell phone. Set your GPS before you drive away, not when you’re driving. Eat in a restaurant, not in the car; and remember that kids in the back seat can also be a distraction. Avoid turning around to tend to children as much as possible. Finally, remind friends and family of the dangers of being distracted while driving. For more information, please visit: www.drivesmartva.org