



NEWS RELEASE

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The Countdown to Hands-Free in Georgia Reaches Zero on Sunday

Drivers urged to switch to hands-free before new law takes effect during the busy July 4th travel period

(ATLANTA) - Ready or not, drivers in Georgia will have to keep their phones out of their hands and away from their bodies if they want to talk on their devices when the state's Hands-Free Law takes effect this Sunday.

The switch to hands-free comes during one of the busiest travel periods of the year and at a time when the Georgia State Patrol and local law enforcement agencies will be on the road as they have in years past during the July 4th holiday period.

"There is no 90-day grace period in the law, which means drivers who are caught with a phone in their hand or any part of their body starting Sunday run the risk of getting a citation," Harris Blackwood, Director of the Governor's Office of Highway Safety said. "While a good number of officers and law enforcement agencies will be issuing warnings during the first few months, we encourage all drivers to go hands-free before July 1."

Georgia's Hands-Free Law will only allow drivers to talk on their phones without having it in their hands or supported by their body.

Even with hands-free, drivers cannot write, read or send text messages, e-mails, social media or any other material on the internet, however, voice-to-text communication is legal.

The law also prohibits drivers from watching and recording video, but they can watch GPS/navigational videos and continuous running dash cams are permitted.

Drivers can listen to streaming music through their phones, but cannot touch their phone to program them when they are on the road but music apps that include video do violate the Hands-Free Law.

Parking their phones when they are on the road will hopefully reduce the number of crashes during the July 4th holiday period as AAA is predicting a record 39.6 million people will be traveling by vehicle in the United States from Tuesday, July 3 through Sunday, July 8.

"The peak of the summer travel season means there will be more vehicles on the road, and that requires drivers to stay focused on what is happening on the road and avoiding distractions like their phones," Colonel Mark W. McDonough, Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Public Safety said. "The Georgia State Patrol reminds drivers to exercise caution in holiday travels, no matter how short the trip may be. Obey the posted speed limit, check that everyone is wearing a seat belt, and make sure when talking on your phone when behind the wheel that it is not in your hand or on any part of your body after July 1."

While the focus has been on drivers to park their phones before the Hands-Free Law takes effect, the Georgia State Patrol, Georgia Department of Transportation and Governor's Office of Highway Safety remind everyone to keep the fireworks off the road by not getting behind the wheel if they are planning to celebrate with alcohol.

Preliminary numbers from GDOT show there 41 people killed in traffic crashes in the state from July 1-9 in 2017 and eight of those deaths were alcohol-related.

State and local law enforcement officers have zero tolerance for impaired drivers and will take any driver they find whose blood-alcohol concentration level is above the state limit of .08 to jail.

Those whose July 4th celebration plans include alcohol are encouraged to plan ahead for a ride with a sober driver or with a ride service.

The Governor's Office of Highway Safety reminds everyone that more information on the Hands-Free Law can be found at <http://headsuptgeorgia.com> and motorists can keep up to date with the latest highway safety news by following us on Facebook (GOHS Georgia) and at gohsgeorgia on Twitter and Instagram.

Due to the incident at the Capitol today, we are only able to send raw interview cuts with Colonel McDonough and Director Blackwood at the following link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/452acghgx8s3pb3/Hands%20Free%20July%204th%20safety%20message.mpg?dl=0>

Col. McDonough

Cut 1 "Now more than ever it is important for folks to put their attention on their driving while they are driving. Not eating. Not putting on makeup and especially not with this in their hands or their eyes on this. If your hands are on this, it is not on the steering wheel. If your eyes are on this, it is not on the roadway. You can try to argue the what ifs and rationalize whatever but the fact of the matter is we know distracted driving causes accidents and it is taking lives."

Cut 2 "An appropriate time at the Fourth of July and everything that is going on. We want folks to be safe on the roadway. You can expect us to very compassionately to start enforcing the law. We want to change behavior and we will do that over the next 90 days. That won't mean our folks may not write a citation because if you obviously don't get it or you obviously don't want to get it or you have caused an accident you can expect an enforcement action because that is next level to change your behavior."

Director Blackwood

Cut 1 "We want to make sure people understand that there are devices that people can buy for as little as 5 or 6 dollars that will support it. Clip it to your air conditioning vent. You can stick it to your window. You can mount it to your center console. It is not expensive and it is something that can save your life."

Cut 2 "We want people to go and enjoy their Fourth of July wherever that might be. Hopefully, that is right here in Georgia. If not, we hope they will get where they are going and come back safely. The way you do that is make sure you are not tired. Make sure you have not been drinking. Make sure you are driving the speed limit. That is not a good suggestion for a speed. That is the limit. That is the law."

(END RELEASE)