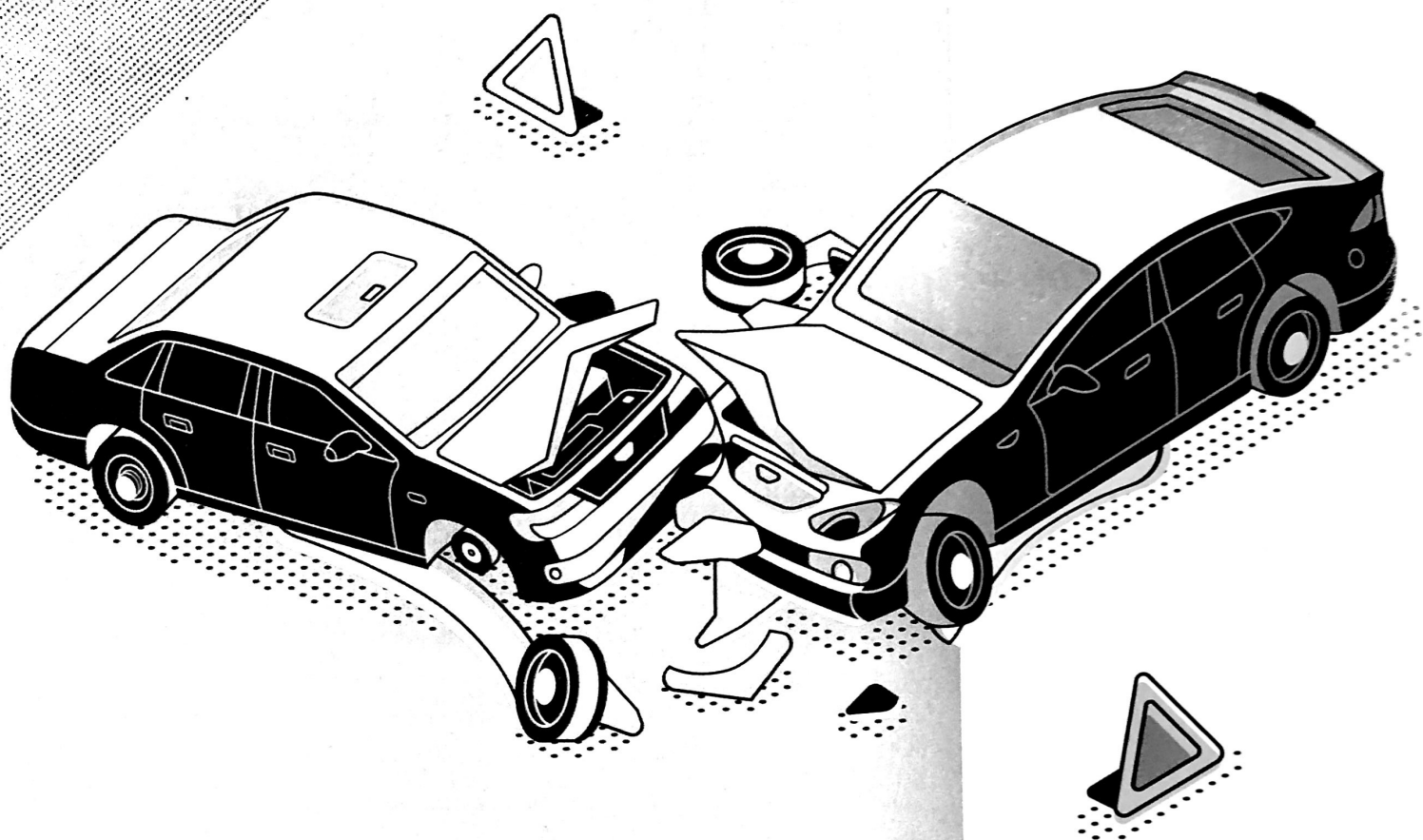


BY
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COMBATING DISTRACTED DRIVING

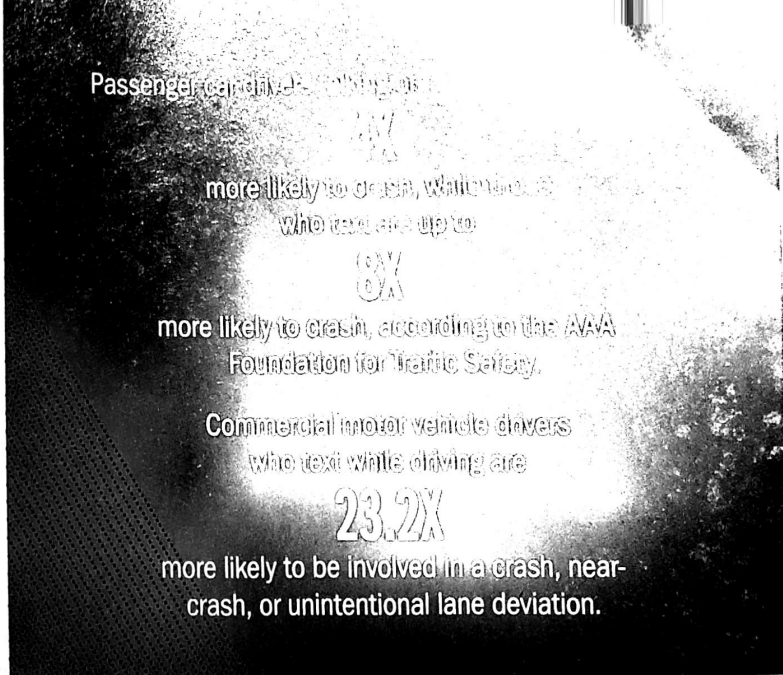
DISTRACTED DRIVING ISN'T A NEW HIGHWAY SAFETY PROBLEM. "WE'VE SEEN PEOPLE DRIVING DISTRACTED SINCE THE ADVENT OF THE AUTOMOBILE," SAYS CHIEF DANIEL SHARP OF THE ORO VALLEY POLICE DEPARTMENT (ARIZONA) AND CHAIR OF THE IACP HIGHWAY SAFETY COMMITTEE. Behind-the-wheel distractions have always included behaviors such as eating, drinking, smoking, grooming, and interacting with others in the vehicle. More recently, drivers' use of cellphones and advanced in-car technologies has exacerbated this longtime problem. Passenger car drivers talking on a cellphone are up to four times more likely to crash while those who text are up to eight times more likely to crash, according to the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. Commercial motor vehicle drivers who text while driving are 23.2 times more likely to be involved in a crash, near-crash, or unintentional lane deviation.

This dangerous technological trend, in turn, is making highway safety a tougher job for law enforcement officers. "Traffic safety is public safety," Chief Sharp says. "As we've seen distracted driving become more of a contributor to crashes, we consider it a high priority to address that trend and change that behavior." As Lisa Robinson, Senior Program Manager for the National Safety Council (NSC), adds, "Distracted driving crashes are 100 percent preventable. It's all about driver behavior." Changing such behavior is challenging and requires a coordinated strategy that includes legislation, public education, enforcement, and technology.

QUANTIFYING THE PROBLEM

Besides threatening their own safety, distracted drivers are a danger to everyone else on the road, including pedestrians; cyclists; other motorists; and people working on or next to the road, such as law enforcement officers, emergency responders, and residential waste and recycling employees.

Highway crash, injury, and fatality statistics confirm the dangers of distracted driving. In the United States, the 2,935 fatal crashes in 2017 that involved distraction represented 9 percent of all fatal crashes and resulted in 3,166 fatalities, including 1,832 drivers, 735 passengers, 497 pedestrians, 70 cyclists, and 32 others, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA's) Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS). Notably,



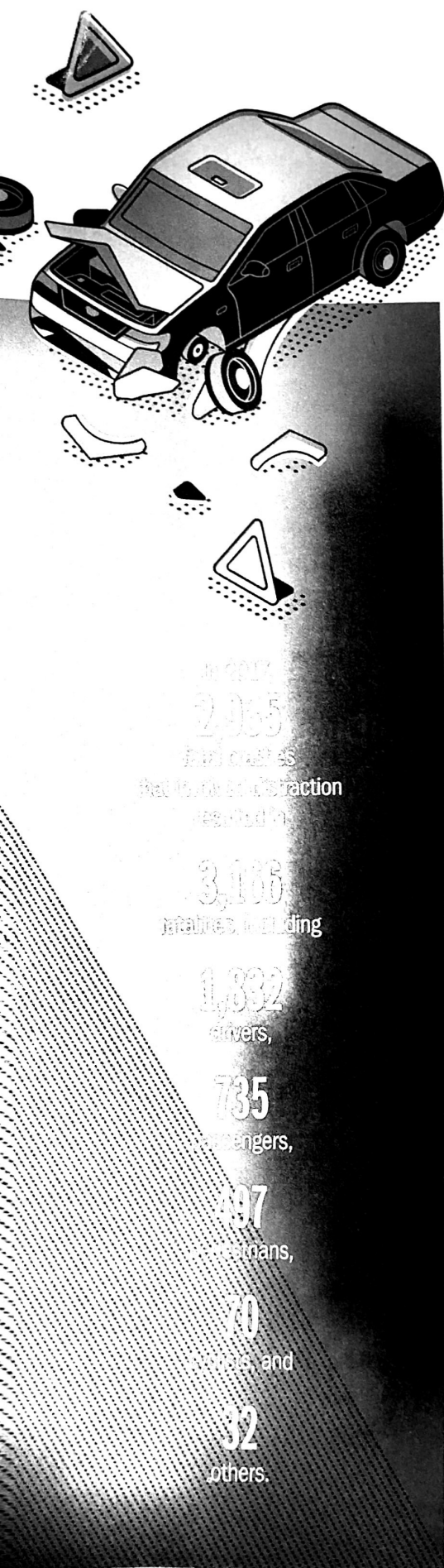
14 percent—or 401—of the distraction-affected crashes involved the confirmed use of a cellphone.

Canadian highway statistics are even more dramatic. Data from Transport Canada's National Collision Database indicate that, in 2015, 22.5 percent of traffic-related fatalities and 28.2 percent of serious injuries in Canada involved distracted driving. "Distracted and inattentive driving is recognized as one of the Big 4 causal factors for deaths and injuries on our roadways," says Inspector Tina Maier, Provincial Traffic Operations, Highway Safety Division of the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP).

What's more, the above figures are likely lower than the reality because, as AAA notes, "It is difficult to detect distraction following a crash, which makes distracted driving one of the most underreported traffic safety issues." Another limiting factor is that "until recently, a lot of crash reports didn't have a box for distracted driving," says NSC's Robinson. Also, in Canada, only four jurisdictions include police reporting on whether a driver's use of an electronic communication device was a contributing factor in a collision.

LEVERAGING THE LAW

Chief Sharp and the Oro Valley Police Department were seeing a "fairly good drop" in the number of fatal car crashes in their jurisdiction—until a few years ago. Then Oro Valley officers noticed a dramatic uptick in fatal crashes, consistent with the proliferation of smartphones. The Oro Valley team started tracking the number of times they noticed drivers interacting with their phones and engaging in other distracted driving behaviors. "Our approach here in Oro Valley—and my focus for IACP—is crash prevention, not crash reduction," Chief Sharp says. "The idea is to identify the behaviors that are contributing to crashes and to stop those behaviors before there's a crash."



Oro Valley's officers recognized quickly that they had a problem with distracted driving related to cellphones. A first step to address the problem was to get a law on the books that would restrict drivers' use of cellphones. In response, Oro Valley enacted a hands-free cellphone ordinance in 2017, in part because a hands-free law is easier to enforce than laws that limit drivers only from texting while driving. "If an officer sees the electronic device in a driver's hands, that's a violation," Chief Sharp says. "We don't have to demonstrate that they were texting, calling, or talking." Beyond the enforcement advantages, Chief Sharp says hands-free laws are more realistic—and more acceptable to legislators—than complete bans on cellphone use in the vehicle.

Currently, 20 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, and three U.S. territories (Puerto Rico, Guam, and U.S. Virgin Islands) prohibit handheld cellphone use for all drivers. In addition, 48 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, and the three territories have laws that prohibit all drivers from texting while driving. And, since teen drivers are particularly susceptible to cellphone-related distracted driving, 38 states and the District of Columbia prohibit teen driver cellphone use and text messaging (though Alabama, Michigan, and Oklahoma allow hands-free use for teens).

Legislators in other countries are also enacting laws to address distracted driving. Ontario, Canada, enacted a law on distracted driving in 2009 and modified it this year to impose stiffer penalties. The law prohibits drivers from using handheld communication or electronic entertainment devices, though they can use hands-free technology as well as mounted devices. For most license holders, the penalties for a first conviction include a fine of C\$615 (if settled out of court), a fine of up to C\$1,000 if a summons is received or if the driver fights the ticket in court and loses, three demerit points, and a three-day license

suspension. The penalties and fines escalate for additional infractions, and novice drivers who hold certain other license types face the same fines, but they receive longer license suspensions. Beyond Ontario, all other Canadian provinces except Nunavut have hands-free distracted driving laws, though the details of each law vary, notes Tracy Shaw, president and CEO of the Canadian Association of Recycling Industries, an industry impacted by distracted driving infractions by both their commercial truck drivers and drivers operating other vehicles on the shared roadways.

Some national governments also have adopted rules to counter distracted driving among drivers of commercial motor vehicles. In the United States, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) passed a rule prohibiting the use of all handheld mobile devices by commercial truck drivers. Penalties can run up to \$2,750 for drivers and up to \$11,000 for employers who allow or require drivers to use a handheld communication device while driving. Drivers also risk losing their driving qualifications under FMCSA and their state. The distracted driving laws in Canadian provinces, meanwhile, apply to drivers of both passenger car and commercial trucks.

EDUCATION AND ENFORCEMENT

When Oro Valley implemented its hands-free ordinance in 2017, the police department launched a public awareness campaign to educate drivers about the law, and it intentionally issued no citations during the campaign's first nine months. "Until we had an ordinance that allowed us to stop drivers, there wasn't a lot we could do as far as educating people," Chief Sharp says. "That was the tool we needed to be able to stop people. We were changing behavior. It's not about writing tickets; it's about public safety."

The OPP uses traffic data analytics to compare its enforcement measures from year to year, and it reports the data to the public.

To educate Oro Valley residents and visitors, the town posted signs at its entry points noting that the community prohibits handheld device use by drivers. Chief Sharp recorded a public service announcement about the ordinance that ran in local movie theaters, and a youth advisory council of students from local high schools recorded its own PSA to reach teen drivers. The local newspaper wrote articles about the ordinance, and the town published pamphlets that explained it. Whenever officers stopped a driver for a cellphone infraction, they gave the person an informational pamphlet.

After the education campaign's initial no-citation period, Oro Valley's officers began issuing tickets using high-visibility enforcement—or HiVE—deployments as well as everyday traffic enforcement. To increase awareness, the department told the community when and where it would be conducting a HiVE deployment.

The OPP has used a similar strategy in Ontario since 2013, conducting two provincial distracted driving enforcement and education campaigns per year. OPP officers also took a different, creative enforcement tactic to counter distracted driving among drivers of commercial motor vehicles, riding in unmarked transport trucks and sprinter vans to gain a better vantage point for detecting violations. In addition, the OPP uses traffic data analytics to compare its enforcement measures from year to year, and it reports the data to the public to raise awareness about the pervasiveness and risks of distracted driving.

In these education and enforcement examples, the police are “trying to convince people that the odds of getting caught are high,” says Jake Nelson, director of Traffic Safety, Advocacy, and Research for AAA. “If people believe that law enforcement is serious about the issue, they’re less likely to break the law in the first place—and that’s the whole point.”

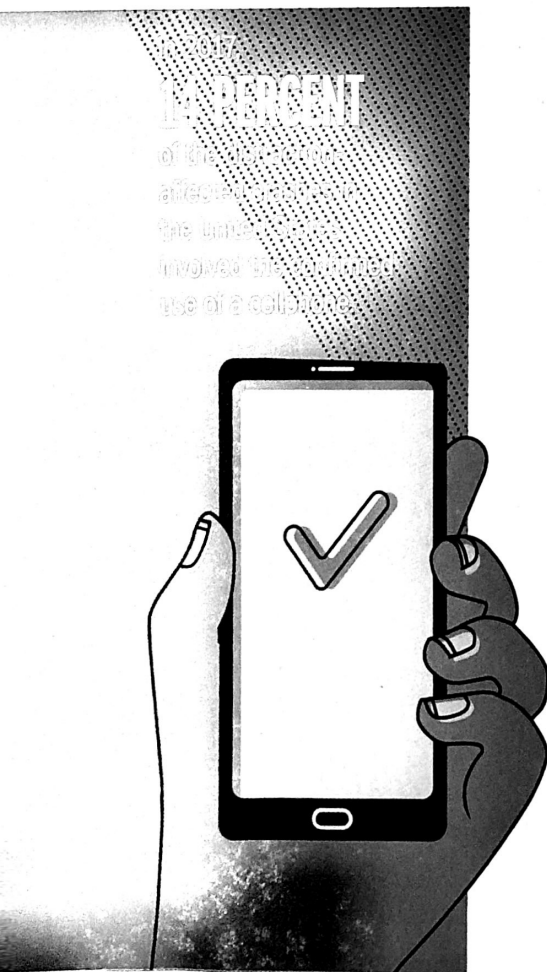
Such deployments take time and human resources, but they’re worth the effort, Chief Sharp says. For one, the resource demand is small compared with the time and personnel needed to respond to a crash. He is also convinced the hands-free ordinance has helped reduce crashes in his jurisdiction. “We haven’t had a fatal crash in Oro Valley in almost two-and-a-half years,” he says. “We feel there’s a relationship there.”

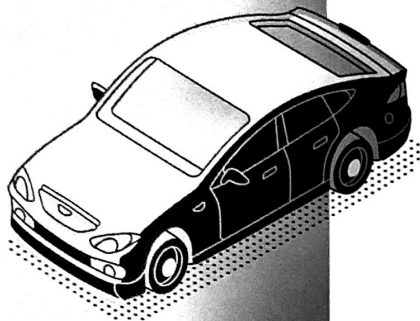
AAA’s Nelson is less convinced about the cause-effect relationship between hands-free laws and fewer car crashes: “In states that have banned handheld cellphone use, what the research shows is that these laws are effective at getting people to use their phone hands-free, but there’s no lasting drop in distraction-affected crashes as a result of it.”

Companies, organizations, and government agencies also have initiated public education campaigns to counter distracted driving. Together for Safer Roads, for example, is a worldwide coalition of private-sector companies from various industries with the goal of improving road safety, including addressing distracted driving.

AT&T launched the It Can Wait campaign with the message that distracted driving is never OK. The campaign encourages drivers to make the pledge to never drive distracted, and it offers resources such as presentations, posters, video links, media talking points, a virtual reality experience of the dangers of distracted driving, and a fact infographic.

The U.S. federal government—through NHTSA—has declared April to be Distracted Driving Awareness Month, which pairs a national advertising campaign with a law enforcement crackdown called U Drive. U Text. U Pay. In Canada, 10 of 13 provinces and territories have conducted media campaigns that have included public service announcements and paid advertisements, and 11 of 13 have had





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40 PERCENT

of vehicle crashes and nearly 30 percent of traffic deaths, according to AAA.

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web-based educational awareness campaigns and outreach, according to the Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators.

Other public education initiatives and supporting legislation seek to reduce distracted driving-related injuries and fatalities in specific industries or occupations, including law enforcement, emergency response, towing, and waste and recycling. All U.S. states, for instance, have a “move over” law. While the language varies by state, they all contain similar requirements. As an example, Hawaii’s statute “requires drivers approaching stationary emergency vehicles displaying flashing lights, including tow trucks, to vacate the lane closest if safe and possible to do so (and, if possible, move two lanes over), and slow to a speed that is safe, reasonable, and prudent.” The goal is to prevent passing vehicles from hitting the emergency personnel. The National Waste & Recycling Association is working to extend “move over” laws to apply to waste and recycling workers, whom passing motorists frequently hit due to distracted driving and other unsafe driving behaviors.

TECHNOLOGY PROS AND CONS

In-car technology is another critical piece of the distracted driving puzzle—one that has the potential to mitigate and exacerbate the problem. On the downside, technology features that increase distractions for drivers, such as advanced infotainment and navigation systems as well as hands-free cell-phone features, are continually being added to vehicles. Infotainment systems take drivers’ eyes and attention off the road and hands off the wheel for potentially dangerous periods of time. And drivers using in-vehicle technologies like voice-based and touchscreen features were visually impaired and mentally distracted for more than 40 seconds when completing tasks like

programming navigation or sending a text message. Removing eyes from the road for just two seconds doubles the risk for a crash, AAA research shows. In addition, driver frustration from unsuccessful use of these systems increases cognitive demand and the risk for distracted driving.

The other side of the technology coin centers on advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS) and autonomous vehicle operating technology, which are designed to prevent drivers from getting into crashes. Some of these systems, for instance, detect and warn the driver if he or she looks away from the road for several seconds for any reason. Other ADAS steer the car back into its lane if it is drifting or stop the car automatically if the system senses the car is in danger of rear-ending the vehicle in front of it.

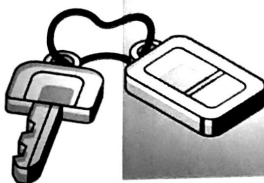
On the plus side, such technologies—when properly used—have the potential to prevent 40 percent of vehicle crashes and nearly 30 percent of traffic deaths, according to AAA. If installed on all vehicles, ADAS could prevent more than 2.7 million crashes, 1.1 million injuries, and nearly 9,500 deaths. “With more distractions likely to enter the car, it’s so critical that cars and trucks have these assisted automation safeguards built into them,” says Jim Olson, senior vice president of safety for Republic Services, a waste and recycling company.

Many companies that operate commercial truck fleets use other technologies—such as onboard cameras—to prevent their drivers from engaging in distracted driving behavior, especially regarding cellphone use. “If our cameras catch a driver using a cellphone while behind the wheel, it’s an opportunity for us to coach them and, if necessary, discipline them,” Olson says. “We’re doing this for their best interest. We don’t want them to be involved in a crash and lose their job—or their life.”

Numerous apps, as well as the do-not-disturb feature on many cellphones, give drivers other technological options to block incoming texts and calls while driving, eliminating the temptation for drivers to be distracted. Most such apps are free, and there are options for iPhone and Android devices.

Unfortunately, the lack of understanding or confusion about the proper function of ADAS technologies can lead to misuse and overreliance on them, which could result in a deadly crash. In addition, false expectations for ADAS can lead to the misuse of the technology or an increase in driver distraction. About 25 percent of vehicle owners using forward-collision warning or lane-departure warning systems report feeling comfortable engaging in other tasks while driving, according to the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. (A simple guide to vehicle safety features can be found at mycardoeswhat.org.)

Chief Sharp agrees with AAA's concerns regarding driver-safety technologies, stating that "drivers might become dependent on them and engage in distracted behavior, assuming the car will take care of them." AAA's Nelson adds that such technologies also run the risk of under-stimulating



drivers, making them bored or complacent. The bottom line, says NSC's Robinson, is that "you are your car's best safety feature. You cannot rely on something else to keep you safe. Technology is a valuable tool, but that does not absolve you of your responsibility to be in control."

CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC

Though Chief Sharp is proud of the headway his team has made against distracted driving in Oro Valley, he acknowledges that the problem isn't going away. "I see distracted driving getting worse because all the evidence shows that people are becoming more dependent on their cellphones, not less," he says.

Some hope for solving the distracted driving problem lies in efforts such as the AAA Foundation's current initiative to review the strategies used so far to address distracted driving. After completing its review this year, the foundation plans to convene a national panel of experts—most likely including law enforcement professionals, AAA's Nelson says—to brainstorm new approaches. Then the group will seek opportunities to conduct pilot tests of the most promising ideas.

Despite the ongoing challenges of distracted driving, Chief Sharp is optimistic about solving the problem because previous highway safety initiatives—such as those that promoted seat belt use and combated drunk driving—have shown it's possible to change driver behavior. The ultimate goal, says OPP's Inspector Maier, is for drivers to voluntarily comply with distracted driving laws and for everyone to adopt a zero tolerance for distracted driving. "Unfortunately, using a cellphone while driving is still perceived as a safe and acceptable practice in many countries, including Canada, and this needs to change," she says. "We need drivers, passengers, and the general public to stigmatize distracted driving, just as they have done with impaired driving. If people can help make distracted driving a socially unacceptable behavior, there is no question that our roads will be safer." ♡

IACP RESOURCES

- IACP DAID Conference
- *Traffic Safety Innovations 2016*: "Distracted Driving: New York State Police" (article)

theIACP.org

- "Traffic Safety Initiatives: Tackling Distracted Driving in Washington State" (article)

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