

BY STEPHANIE GROVES

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DELPHOS — Although talking on mobile phones and texting while driving remain major concerns on the nation's roadways, drivers are also webbing while driving with increasing frequency. This behavior poses greater concerns in the effort to reduce distracted driving.

While the distracted driving focus has traditionally been on young people, the data indicate that motorists of all ages are using the mobile web while driving.

Ohio's texting ban is now in effect and tickets started flowing in March, following a six-month warning period. ORC 4511.204 explicitly describes the law, provisions and penalties of driving while texting. For drivers under the age of 18, texting and the use of cell phones and other portable electronic devices are primary offenses.

Fines for adult violators is \$150 and for teen violators, \$150 and a 60-day suspension of license. For teens with multiple violations, fines top out at \$300 with possible loss of driver's license for a year.

Delphos Police Chief Kyle Fittro reports there has been no confirmation of any incidents involving a driver being distracted through the use of an electronic device. Nor have there been any tickets given out for driving while using an electronic device.

"The law is pretty cut and dried for drivers age 18 and under," Fittro detailed. "Absolutely no electronic devices. It is a primary offense and the juvenile will be stopped and ticketed."

Webbing: newest driving distraction

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Fittro said that on the surface, the new law sounds good but determining the age of a driver who may be texting or webbing is a challenge. With adults, the texting law has quite a few exceptions like using a handheld electronic wireless communications device for emergency purposes; safety-related information, including emergency, traffic, or weather alerts; or data used primarily by the motor vehicle.

“We can’t prove an adult was texting or webbing unless they are honest,” Fittro stated. “We can’t take their device and investigate.”

In 2011, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) conducted a phone survey of more than 6,000 drivers in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The National Survey of Distracted Driving Attitudes and Behavior assessment found that 18 percent of the respondents send text messages while driving and 66-percent said they continued to drive while texting.

Results indicate close to 50 percent of drivers under 25 have engaged in texting while driving. Close to 30 percent of the respondents age 21 to 34 said they feel texting has no impact on their driving. Most drivers said they are willing to answer a call and send a text while driving.

State Farm’s Strategic Resources Department sponsored a four-year online survey of 4,000 U.S. consumers aged 18 and older who identified themselves as having some insurance and financial responsibility for their household. The 2012 culminated data shows an increase in the number of people using mobile web services while driving.

Drivers aged 18-29 disclosed these statistics:

- Accessing the Internet while on a cell phone while driving increased from 29 percent in 2009 to 48 percent in 2012.
- Reading social media networks while driving increased from 21 percent in 2009 to 36 percent in 2012.

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- Updating social networks while driving increased from 20 percent in 2009 to 30 percent in 2011.
- Checking email while driving rose from 32 percent in 2009 to 43 percent in 2012.

Director of Technology Research at State Farm Chris Mullen said that the mobile Internet is generating another set of distractions for drivers to avoid. While communities are working to reduce texting while driving, we must also be concerned about the growing use of multiple mobile web services while driving.

For more information visit odes.ohio.gov/orc/4511.204.