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Anti-Texting Law to Take Effect March 8 in Pennsylvania

Harrisburg – Pennsylvania’s new law prohibiting text-based communication while driving will take effect at 12:01 a.m. on March 8, making texting while driving a primary offense carrying a \$50 fine.

“Your most important job when behind the wheel is to focus only on driving. Most people would never close their eyes for five seconds while driving, but that’s how long you take your eyes off the road, or even longer, every time you send or read a text message,” PennDOT Secretary Barry J. Schoch said. “It’s not just your own life you’re risking; it’s the lives and safety of every motorist around you.”

The new law specifically does the following:

- Makes it a primary offense to use an Interactive Wireless Communication Device (IWCD) to send, read or write a text-based message.
- Defines an IWCD as a wireless phone, personal digital assistant, smartphone, portable or mobile computer or similar devices that can be used for texting, instant messaging, emailing or browsing the Internet.
- Defines a text-based message as a text message, instant message, email or other written communication composed or received on an IWCD.
- Institutes a \$50 fine for convictions.
- Makes clear that this law supersedes and preempts any local ordinances restricting the use of interactive wireless devices by drivers.

“This is a serious problem and we are hoping that we can educate citizens on the dangers of texting while driving and prevent future accidents,” said State Police Commissioner Frank Noonan. “Our troopers will attempt to use observations of the driver while the vehicle is in motion to determine if traffic stops are warranted. An example might be the motorist continues to manipulate the device over an extended distance with no apparent voice communication.

“Ultimately, we hope that our enforcement efforts will create voluntary compliance by the majority of motorists,” Noonan said.

In 2010, there were nearly 14,000 crashes in Pennsylvania where distracted driving played a role, with 68 people dying in those crashes.

Learn more online at www.dot.state.pa.us and choose “Anti-Texting Law.”

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