**2020 U DRIVE. U TEXT. U PAY. CAMPAIGN**

**SAMPLE OP-ED**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: [Date]**

**CONTACT: [Name, Phone Number, E-mail Address]**

**Note: Before filling in the names of the organization and organization spokesperson, you MUST contact them for permission to use their names in this press release. Also, you must get their approval for the language of their quotations, and any changes or additions they may require. Only after this is done should you issue the press release.**

**Drive the Way You Want Others to Drive: Distraction-Free**

***U Drive. U Text. U Pay.***

These days, it seems like everyone uses their cell phone for everything under the sun—from checking the weather and news, to catching up with family and friends, and scheduling appointments. We use our cell phones to check social media, order groceries, and listen to our favorite songs. But if you’re driving, cell phone use comes with a cost: distraction.

According to NHTSA, between 2012 and 2018, nearly 23,000 people died in crashes involving a distracted driver. In fact, there were 2,841 people killed in motor vehicle crashes involving distracted drivers in 2018. That means that nearly one-tenth of all fatal crashes that year were reported as distraction-affected.

While we generally think of distracted driving as texting or talking on the cell phone, it can take many other forms: adjusting the GPS, putting on makeup, eating, or even interacting with other passengers. The bottom line is this: If your attention is anywhere other than the road, you’re driving distracted, and that makes you a dangerous driver. And, texting is the most pervasive because it takes your eyes off the road, hands off the wheel, and concentration off driving.

The month of April is National Distracted Driving Awareness Month. **[Local/State Officials]** are spreading the word that the U.S. Department of Transportation’s National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is teaming up with **[Local Law Enforcement Office]** for a high-visibility enforcement effort April 9 to April 13, 2020. Law enforcement officers will intensify their efforts to stop texting and other forms of distracted driving by issuing citations for all distraction violations. The campaign*, U Drive. U Text. U Pay.*, aims to spread the message about the dangers of texting and distracted driving, and to remind drivers of the consequences of their distracted actions.

You have undoubtedly seen another driver with their eyes on their phone. In your mind, it’s wrong for *them*, but you may be guilty of it yourself. Many drivers are guilty of this “double standard” and give themselves a personal exemption when it comes to distracted driving. In its 2018 Traffic Safety Culture Index, the AAA Foundation reported that while nearly 96 percent of drivers believed it was very or extremely dangerous to read a text or email while driving, 4 out of 10 drivers admitted to doing so within the previous 30 days.

Over the years, millennials have become the worst texting-while-driving offenders, using their cell phones to text, talk and scroll through social media while behind the wheel. According to NHTSA, young drivers 16 to 24 years old have also been observed using handheld electronic devices while driving at higher rates than older drivers have every year since 2007. In fact, in 2018, 8 percent of people killed in teen (15-19) driving crashes died when these teen drivers were distracted at the times of the crashes.

**Drive Safe Every Trip**

No one wants to get a ticket for distracted driving. And you certainly don’t want to cause a crash because you decided to read or send a text. If you’re driving, follow these steps:

* If you are expecting a text message or need to send one, pull over and park your car in a safe location. Once you are safely off the road and parked, it is safe to text.
* Ask a passenger to be your “designated texter.” Allow them access to your phone to respond to calls or messages.
* Do not engage in social media scrolling or messaging while driving.
* Cell phone use can be habit-forming. Struggling to not text and drive? Activate your phone’s “Do Not Disturb” feature, or put your cell phone in the trunk, glove box, or back seat of your vehicle until you arrive at your destination.

You should never be embarrassed to do the right thing. It’s more embarrassing—and costly—to have a law enforcement officer stop you and give you a ticket for your dangerous behavior. And it is an absolute nightmare to be responsible for injuring or killing another human being. Texting while driving is dangerous and illegal. Break the cycle. Remember: *U Drive. U Text. U Pay.*

For more information, visit [www.trafficsafetymarketing.gov](http://www.trafficsafetymarketing.gov).

###