

ARTICLE

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New Jersey Fights Distracted Driving With “No Texting While Driving Day”



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The responsibility for reducing car accidents in New Jersey falls on everyone from drivers themselves to auto manufacturers and transportation engineers. One important means of reducing vehicle-related injuries and deaths is smart public policies to enhance criminal penalties for dangerous behavior and educate people about the consequences.

New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie recently proclaimed “No Texting While Driving Day” statewide to remind drivers of the state’s cell phone bans and the dangers of distracted driving. One important focus of such campaigns is younger drivers who send high volumes of texts and are more likely to indulge in distractions behind the wheel.

“Research shows that sending just one text while driving can make you as dangerous as a drunk driver,” Attorney General Jeffrey S. Chiesa recently told a gathering of more than 800 New Jersey high school students. He cited studies showing similar levels of cognitive impairment for both of these causes of car and truck accidents. He noted that law enforcement initiatives and education have helped us learn to stigmatize drunk drivers as a danger to society, and the same must happen with texting.

The students also heard from New Jersey safety advocate Angela Donato, whose sister was killed in 2011 by a distracted driver who was talking on a cell phone. Her efforts led lawmakers to pass a new law that creates a legal presumption of recklessness for using a hand-held communication device behind the wheel when involved in a motor vehicle accident.

New Jersey has a primary ban on handheld cell phone use and texting by all drivers, meaning that a driver who breaks the law can be pulled over for the distracted driving offense alone. State laws also ban talking on hands-free phones by newly licensed drivers and bus drivers.

Distracted Driving: A Significant Factor In Car Accident Rates

The National Safety Council provides an extensive range of reports and statistics that prove the dangers of driving distracted. Proof that the problem has reached epidemic proportions: in recent years, more than 100,000 accidents involving cars, trucks and motorcycles included a report of a texting driver. One study concluded that increases in texting activity by drivers between 2001 and 2007 caused more than 16,000 additional traffic fatalities.

Stricter laws and public education are a part of the solution, but civil accountability to negligent and reckless drivers remains a critical option for injury victims and wrongful death plaintiffs. A New Jersey car accident lawyer can explain the many ways by which distracted drivers can be identified and held liable for damages.