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## Distracted driving awareness campaign kicks off today

By Daisy Nelson Today's News-Herald 8 hrs ago



Mayor Cal Sheehy officially proclaims July 2019 as Distracted Driving Awareness Month.

Courtesy photo from MPO

It's a well-known fact that texting while driving is an issue and should be avoided (especially now that it's state law) to help better protect yourself and others while on the road. But what if you just really want to change the song on your playlist or crank up the AC? Maybe you just want to take one bite of your burrito or turn your head to join in on a backseat conversation.

It doesn't have to involve a phone — if it takes your eyes off the road, it's a distraction.

“This is a tough one because it’s human behavior. We all get in our habits,” said Vinny Gallegos, director of Lake Havasu Metropolitan Planning Organization. While texting and driving is a large part of the problem, “It’s really not the only culprit,” he said.

“There are so many distractions that I and others experience behind the wheel, and some can be considered very legitimate things,” he said, like adjusting the volume of the radio or the air conditioner. “We’re very used to those things, but they are still taking our attention off the road.”

Then, when you start adding other passengers in the car, pets, etc., distraction potential further increases.

That’s why the Lake Havasu Metropolitan Planning Organization is launching a countywide campaign to raise awareness of the issue, with the hope that Mohave County residents can be better reminded to give full attention to the road. The campaign kicks off today and will continue year-long.

In a partnership with Kingman, Bullhead City and the county, as well as local law enforcement departments from each community and Sparklight Advertising, LHMPO will create a series of eight videos, spread out along the 12-month period. The videos will then be pushed out using social media and digital resources. The campaign is funded by LHMPO.

“In these videos, they’re going to see the environment that they’re familiar with, like the London Bridge in the background,” Gallegos said. “They’re going to hopefully see faces they might be familiar with, like our mayor, chief of police, fire chief. My hope... is that it will trigger a reminder in people.”

Lake Havasu Police Sergeant Tom Gray said if officers observe cellphone use while driving, “educational contacts are being made.”

Citations for the state law cannot be issued for a violation until Jan 1, 2021.

Two videos are ready to go and will be released within the next few months. Then, the campaign will move on to the other cities, wrapping things up at the end of the year with Mohave County.

While the other two cities will also focus on the dangers of distracted driving, the unincorporated area of Mohave County will focus instead on speeding and aggressive driving.

“While speeding is a problem everywhere... once you get out on the highway and you really have that opportunity, it’s seen much more frequently,” Gallegos said.

“The message, I guess in some ways, is simple — we just don’t want any more crashes and fatalities,” Gallegos said.

That is the mission of the Arizona Strategic Highway Safety Plan, which identifies four E's that can be used as solutions to reach that goal: engineering, enforcement, emergency services and education.

While engineering is a constant conversation, Gallegos said, "I think... education is a really important area that we need to spend some more time on, and I think this is our opportunity to do it."