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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Distraction: Dangerous, Careless, Preventable
National Safe Driving Week, December 1-7, 2019

It's a scene that is far too familiar on roads across Canada: a cell phone sounds an alert, the driver reaches for the phone, and in the short time it takes to read the screen, a collision has occurred.

Distracted driving is a trend on the rise, a dangerous and life-threatening behaviour that must be stopped. To mark this year's National Safe Driving Week, the Canada Safety Council and the Insurance Brokers Association of Canada (IBAC) share a crucial message: distraction behind the wheel is entirely preventable. Just don't do it.

The Statistics

Distracted driving statistics are understated because distraction isn't always easy to prove. In fatal accidents where distraction was a possible factor, there may not be evidence of phone usage or, sadly, a living witness to tell the story. This has resulted in a significant underreporting of the issue – still, the data currently available reveals staggering numbers.

According to Transport Canada, distraction was a contributing factor in 21 per cent of fatal collisions and 27 per cent of collisions resulting in serious injury in 2016. Comparatively, those numbers were reported at 16 and 22 per cent, respectively, in 2006.

The Canadian Council of Motor Transportation Administrators (CCMTA) provides further context to these numbers: 1.7 per cent of fatal collisions and 1.9 per cent of collisions resulting in serious injury involved electronic communication devices between 2010–14. While more recent statistics are not available, the prevalence of mobile devices in today's society makes it a reasonable assumption that these numbers, too, are on the rise.

And if you're fortunate enough to avoid injury or fatality, you'll still be subject to fines and potentially demerit points depending on your province. Refer to [this chart](#) by the Canadian Automobile Association for a detailed breakdown.

To further compound the financial costs, your auto insurance premiums could sharply increase if you're found to have been operating a vehicle while distracted.

"Insurance is all about risk, and distracted driving is an extremely risky behavior," said Peter Braid, Chief Executive Officer of IBAC. "That's why insurance brokers are partnering with the Canada Safety Council to raise awareness of the danger and encourage drivers to keep their eyes on the road. The stakes are high – death, injury, property damage, fines and rising insurance premiums. Whatever the distraction, it's not worth the risk."

The challenge

The challenge in addressing this issue is cognitive dissonance and, where distracted driving is concerned, willingly engaging in behaviours that are known to contribute to the likelihood of collisions. Studies in provinces across Canada have borne out the same result: a majority of drivers understand that distracted driving is dangerous and illegal; yet, the same respondents report using their devices behind the wheel anyway.

"Personal accountability is a major component of society's role in reducing distracted driving deaths," said Gareth Jones, president of the Canada Safety Council. "If you're in the majority of road users who understand the risks, you owe it to your family and to fellow road users to put the phone away and otherwise minimize distractions. It's a choice that each of us has completely within our control. Building a culture of safe driving happens one person and one decision at a time, so let's choose well."

Other types of distraction

While the topic of distracted driving is often discussed in the context of texting and calling behind the wheel, other forms of distraction exist and can also be harmful. Distracted driving is characterized as any action that removes your focus from the road. This can include eating, adjusting music, heat or GPS, applying makeup and interacting with passengers in the vehicle.

Tips to avoid distraction behind the wheel

- Put your phone on silent or on Do Not Disturb mode. You won't be tempted by an alert you don't hear.
- Even better, use an app or a built-in function that activates a Do Not Disturb feature automatically when connected to your vehicle's Bluetooth or when increased speed is detected. See the enclosed tip sheet for examples.
- Out of sight, out of mind – put your phone in a glove compartment, a zipped purse or knapsack, or even the back seat.
- Make sure to leave enough time in your schedule to eat and groom before getting in the car.
- Ensure that your temperature, music and GPS are set before you leave.
- If it's really that important, pull over.

Above all else, remember that driving is a potentially deadly task that requires your full attention. You wouldn't take a call while operating a bulldozer; why do the same with a vehicle capable of going at much higher speeds?

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