

MERCED POLICE DEPARTMENT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Merced Police Department challenges drivers to 'silence' the distraction *April is Distracted Driving Awareness Month*

April is National Distracted Driving Awareness Month and the Merced Police Department will be joining law enforcement agencies statewide stopping drivers who violate California's hands-free cell phone law. Throughout the month of April, the MPD will have additional officers on patrol looking specifically for drivers on their phones.

In 2018, the Merced Police Department issued 482 citations to drivers texting, calling, or performing another function on their phone. Of those 482 citations, 64 were during last year's Distracted Driving Awareness Month. Of the over 2,000 collisions in Merced last year, 38 involved one of the parties using a cell phone resulting in 38 injuries. Distracted driving is dangerous, especially when it involves a cell phone. According to preliminary data from the California Highway Patrol (CHP), 66 people were killed and more than 6,500 injured in 2017 from distracted driving-related crashes.

A 2018 observational survey by the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) on driver cell phone use found about 4.5 percent of drivers are still using their cell phone illegally, a nearly 27 percent increase from 2016.

"That text or phone call will never be worth losing a life over," says Sergeant Dan Dabney of the Merced Police Department. "That is why curbing distracted driving is high on our priority list."

Under the most recent cell phone law that went into effect in 2017, drivers are prohibited from having a phone in their hand for any reason and can only use their phone in a hands-free manner. The phones must be mounted on the dashboard, windshield or center console, and can only be touched once with the swipe or tap of a finger to activate or deactivate a function. First-time offenders face a [\\$162 fine](#).

If you need to make a call or text someone, pull over and park at a safe location. Struggling to stay off the phone while driving? Put your phone in a place you can't reach it such as in the backseat or in the trunk.

Funding for distracted driving enforcement operations are provided by a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety, through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

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