



## Drivers urged to set aside distractions during Work Zone Awareness Week

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The sometimes tragic results of distracted driving are now routinely making headlines. Combine the exceedingly high risks of distracted driving with the inherent risks of driving through roadway construction zones, and you have an even higher potential for tragedy.

Jennifer Smith knows all too well the possible consequences of distracted driving. In September 2008 her mother, Linda Doyle, was killed in a car crash caused by a driver who was talking on a cell phone for less than a minute – a momentary lapse in judgment that resulted in a lifetime of regret and sorrow. Following her mother's death, Smith founded FocusDriven, a support and advocacy group, to raise awareness of the hazards of distracted driving.

Smith and others were on hand Friday at work zone locations in Oklahoma City and Tulsa to kick off National Work Zone Awareness Week, April 19-23. This year's theme, "Work Zones Need Your Undivided Attention," emphasizes the need for increased attention in work zones and to avoid distractions while driving. A proclamation signed by Gov. Brad Henry, declaring Work Zone Awareness Week in Oklahoma, was presented to the state Transportation Commission by Lt. Gov. Jari Askins at its meeting earlier this week.

Road construction season will soon reach its peak, with an increased number of work zones, due to the continuation of projects funded by President Obama's American Reinvestment and Recovery Act and regular projects already planned to take advantage of the spring and summer construction months.

"While we are completing additional projects made possible by stimulus money, we will have as much construction across the state this year as we had late last summer. We ask that the public be patient as well as cautious during this time," Oklahoma Department of Transportation Director Gary Ridley, said.

Seventeen motorists were killed and 767 were injured in 1,278 collisions in Oklahoma work zones in 2009, according to figures compiled by ODOT. These numbers mark the highest number of injuries, the third highest number of fatalities and the greatest number of work zone collisions in a decade.

Work zones, by their very nature, require more driver attention than a normal roadway. To remain focused when driving, and for the safety of others, set your phone to mute and pull off the road to a safe location to talk or text. If you are in a car with a driver who is texting or talking on a cell phone, ask them to put the distraction away until it is safe. When driving, devote your time to the task at hand – this is not the time to multitask.

Some of the most common distractions include using a cell phone, eating and drinking, grooming, reading (including maps), using PDA or navigations systems and watching videos.

Research conducted by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration shows that drivers who send and receive text messages take their eyes off the road for an average of 4.6 seconds out of every 6 seconds while texting. This means that at 55 miles per hour the driver is traveling the length of a football field without looking at the road.

This year's Work Zone Awareness Week is sponsored in Oklahoma by ODOT, the City of Oklahoma City, the Oklahoma Department of Public Safety, the Oklahoma Highway Safety Office, the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority, the Federal Highway Administration, The Association of Oklahoma General Contractors, AAA-Oklahoma and FocusDriven.

--www.okladot.state.ok.us--

(Editors and News Directors: For more information call the ODOT Media & Public Relations Division at 405-521-6000. Also, each day during Work Zone Awareness Week, one of the sponsoring agencies will issue a separate press release.)

INFORMATION RELEASE

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Jennifer Smith, speaking, and Gina Harris of FocusDriven, share their heartbreaking stories of losing a loved one due to distracted driving. They, along with ODOT and other partners, emphasized the importance of setting aside distractions while behind the wheel as part of the National Work Zone Awareness Week kick-off in Oklahoma City on Friday.



Oklahoma Highway Patrol Capt. Chris West emphasizes the need for drivers to put aside distractions, pay attention and follow posted speed limits in Oklahoma work zones. Law enforcement statewide will be stepping up patrols in observance of National Work Zone Awareness Week in Oklahoma, April 19-23.

Joined by local law enforcement and Oklahoma Turnpike Authority workers, Oklahoma Department of Transportation and OTA Director Gary Ridley speaks at the National Work Zone Awareness Week press conference in Tulsa on Friday. This year's events highlighted the dangers of distracted driving and inattention in work zones.

