

Driver distraction leading cause of road deaths for fourth year in a row

The Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) are reporting that 2016 marked the fourth consecutive year that inattentive drivers were behind the highest number of lives lost on OPP-patrolled roads over the other main causal factors in road fatalities, known as the 'Big Four'.

In total, 65 people died in OPP-investigated collisions last year in which an inattentive driver was either a contributing factor or the primary cause of the death. In comparison to the other Big Four categories, 2016 ended with 55 speed-related, 53 seatbelt-related and 45 alcohol-related deaths.

As officers conduct their annual province-wide Distracted Driving Campaign, police are looking to Ontarians to help with the educational component of the campaign – a role that remains critical to helping keep Ontario roads safe.

'Road deaths linked to distracted drivers will not let up unless every road user says 'enough is enough' and shows a complete intolerance for what continues to be the most life-threatening driver behaviour on our roads,' commented OPP Commissioner Vince Hawkes. 'Starting with this campaign, we want to see every Ontarian, especially passengers of all ages, take a firm stand against those who endanger their lives by using their cell phones or engaging in other forms of distractions behind the wheel.'

'When young people are needlessly injured or killed as a result of distracted driving, my heart aches,' Community Safety and Correctional Services Minister Marie-France Lalonde said. 'Losing a loved one, losing a child, is one of the worst things imaginable – the text can wait.'

'The OPP's Distracted Driving Campaign is an important reminder to put the phone away and focus on driving,' she added, 'Keeping our roads, communities, and families safe starts and ends with each of us.'

'Distracted driving continues to be a very serious challenge on our roads,' Transportation Minister Steven Del Duca observed. 'It is particularly frustrating to see this behaviour – which is completely avoidable – cause the kind of carnage that it does. Even one death is one too many.'

'It's time for all of us to put down our phones and speak up if we see our friends and family driving dangerously,' he added.

'Together we can make this behaviour as socially unacceptable as impaired driving.'

With the exception of 2012, inattentive drivers have taken more lives on OPP-patrolled roads than speeding and alcohol-impaired drivers since Ontario distracted driving laws took effect in 2009.

A driver convicted of distracted driving faces a fine of \$400, plus a victim surcharge and court fee, a fine of up to \$1,000 if the driver receives a summons or fights the ticket and three demerit points applied to the driver's record.