



Texting while driving ban half way through warning period

Fines and license suspensions will begin in March

A law to ban texting while driving took effect last August and began with a sixth-month grace period that is now a little more than half completed. Signed by Gov. John Kasich last June, House Bill 99 makes texting behind the wheel illegal for motorists of all ages on a secondary enforcement basis. The offense can be cited only if another moving violation has occurred and will take full effect in March.

The bill also makes it illegal for drivers under age 18 to use an electronic wireless communications device in any manner. For novice drivers this means they can be ticketed for texting while driving and for talking on a cell phone. No ticket may be issued for a violation of either prohibition until after the warning period ends on March 1.

"Texting while driving is the most dangerous of all distractions behind the wheel," said Brian Newbacher, director of public affairs for AAA East Central. "The teen driving portion of the bill is very strong and AAA supports it 100 percent. AAA would like to see a primary enforcement ban for all drivers in the future but this is a great start."

Motorists violating the law after the grace period would be subject to a fine of no more than \$150. Teen drivers also would be subject to having



RISKY BUSINESS — Texting is one of the most dangerous things you can do behind the wheel.

their license suspended for 60 days for a first offense. The teen provisions were added to the original bill by Senator Tom Patton, chairman of the Senate Highways & Transportation Committee.

Credible research illustrates the degrading effect that text messag-

ing has on driving performance. The AAA Traffic Safety Foundation analyzed data from a 2006 Virginia Tech study involving 100 drivers behind the wheel. It found that taking one's eyes off the road for more than two seconds doubles the risk of a crash. Another study by the University of Utah in

2009, found that motorists driving a passenger vehicle were six times more likely to crash if they were writing, reading or sending a text message.

AAA announced in 2009 that it would work to pass laws banning text messaging by drivers in all 50 states, citing strong public support for the laws and the danger of distracted driving. Ohio became the 39th state to ban texting behind the wheel with AAA working for passage of a texting while driving ban for approximately four years.

Ohio cities including Cleveland and Beachwood ban texting on a primary basis and those laws will take precedent due to Ohio's Home Rule laws. Studies have shown texting while driving to be an extremely dangerous distraction for drivers due to the extended time (an average of 4.6 seconds) spent not looking at the road.

TWO THUMBS DOWN

A recent AAA survey found 95 percent of Ohio AAA members support a statewide ban on texting behind the wheel. However, research by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety revealed that 35 percent of motorists of all ages and nearly half of drivers ages 18 to 24 admit to text messaging while driving.

