



*a memorandum from the*

# Glendale Police Department

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DATE: January 17, 2017  
TO: Kevin Phelps, City Manager  
FROM: Rick St. John, Chief of Police  
SUBJECT: Final Report - Distracted Driver

This memorandum is written to provide information on Councilmember Tolmachoff's Council Item of Special Interest (CIOSI) on distracted driving.

The Scope of Work (SOW) outlined three deliverables; (1) an analysis of national, statewide, and city crash data relative to distracted driving; (2) an analysis of other government agency efforts to combat distracted driving; and (3) an analysis of other cities' distracted driving ordinances.

## **Results on Deliverables:**

A review of the latest national data suggests that distracted driving was the apparent cause of 10% of all auto accident fatalities and 34% of all injury collisions in 2015. The State of Arizona reports that distracted driving was a causal factor in 48% of all collisions during the same time period; data includes fatalities, injury collisions and non-injury collisions. And finally, City of Glendale data suggests that distracted driving was a factor in 40.8% of all collisions in calendar year 2015. Year to date data for the first 8 months of 2016 shows a slight increase compared to 2015 in total collisions caused, at least in part, by distracted driving.

The challenge faced when analyzing current data, particularly in the State of Arizona and the City of Glendale, centers on how collision investigators collect and report data on distracted driving. The current Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) statewide crash form is not conducive to the collection of this information. Research and conversation indicates that ADOT has plans to change the crash form in early 2017 so that a better overall analysis of the problem can be completed.

Regardless of any arguments related to the quality of data, most state and local governments accept that distracted driving is a growing concern. Many state and local governments are responding to this growing concern with educational campaigns directed primarily at youth, and also with the general public. Some have adopted a more aggressive stance by implementing state laws or city ordinances prohibiting the use of electronic devices, except hands-free, while operating a motor vehicle. Again, whether a state or local government enacts a law or ordinance, or solely relies on a comprehensive educational campaign to combat distracted driving, there is insufficient empirical data to suggest that one strategy is better than the other.

In Arizona, the cities of Phoenix and Tempe are the only local governments who have enacted an ordinance prohibiting the use of an electronic device while operation a motor vehicle. The Phoenix ordinance is specific to sending or receiving written communication via a wireless electronic communication device that provides for data communication other than by voice.

Further, the Phoenix ordinance calls for a more severe penalty for violators who have been involved in a collision.

The Tempe ordinance makes it unlawful to operate a motor vehicle while using a mobile electronic device if such driving constitutes a risk to that person or others. This ordinance also calls for a more severe penalty for violators who have been involved in a serious injury collision.

**Recommendation:**

Distracted driving is a concern in every community across the country. The degree to which distracted driving creates unsafe roadways in Arizona and the City of Glendale has yet to be determined. The City of Glendale does currently have an educational campaign to combat the problem of distracted driving with plans to improve upon the program in 2017.

Traffic safety experts around the nation seem to agree that a single city ordinance in a large metropolitan area has little impact on the issue. The national push is for states to enact laws prohibiting distracted driving in some form or fashion for purposes of consistency, to meet community expectations and to facilitate more effective enforcement across jurisdictional boundaries.

It should also be noted that the State of Arizona identified the top three traffic safety concerns as aggressive driving, impaired driving, and motor vehicle occupants failing to use restraint devices. Distracted driving is not currently viewed as one of the major traffic safety concerns, but legislators are talking about taking action against distracted driving. The State of Arizona is in the process of reviewing what a state distracted driver law might prohibit, and what penalties would be associated with any violation of the law.

***It is the recommendation of the Glendale Police Department that the City of Glendale continue its education program but hold off on enacting a city ordinance until we have better data to identify potential remedies, and the legislature settles on a position regarding a state law prohibiting distracted driving.***