

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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TENNESSEE HIGHWAY SAFETY OFFICE LAUNCHES 'OPERATION HANDS FREE'

Tennessee Hosts Distracted-Driving Enforcement Bus Tour Campaign April 1

TENNESSEE – On Monday, April 1, the Tennessee Highway Safety Office (THSO) is partnering with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), Tennessee Highway Patrol (THP), Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT), local law enforcement, and other traffic safety partners for "Operation Hands Free" to crack down on violators of Tennessee's Hands Free Law during National Distracted Driving Awareness Month. To kick off the campaign, the THSO will host four press events on April 1 at 10 a.m. (local time) including bus tours in Nashville, Memphis, Chattanooga, and Knoxville. See below for details to attend and ride along.

"The THSO is proud to continue collaborating with the NHTSA, THP, TDOT, and our many traffic safety partners across Tennessee," said THSO Director Buddy Lewis. "Since 2017, we've been working with agencies statewide to localize this effort, and now it's become a common practice. In 2021, the THSO was honored to receive the [Governor's Highway Safety Association's Peter K. O'Rourke Special Achievement Award](#) for the innovative bus-tour concept and its effectiveness."

During each bus tour, THP and officers inside the bus will observe traffic for distracted drivers then radio patrol vehicles to execute enforcement action. TDOT will assist by providing HELP trucks for traffic management. They will also utilize the digital highway message boards to spread awareness.

"Distracted driving is one of the most preventable causes of death and injury on our roadways," said THP Colonel Matt Perry. "For the safety of yourself and others, put all distractions away the moment you start your ignition. If you see unsafe driving behaviors you can reach THP dispatch by dialing *THP (847) using your hands-free device, or have a passenger make the call. Exercise good judgement and be safe."

According to Tennessee's Hands Free Law (T.C.A. § 55-8-199), it is illegal for drivers to hold a cell phone or mobile device with any part of their body. Violation of this law can result in points on your driving record. Drivers can learn more at www.HandsFreeTN.com. Visit the following link to access distracted-driving crash data provided by Tennessee's Integrated Traffic Analysis Network (TITAN): <https://www.tn.gov/safety/stats/dashboards/distracted-driver.html>.

PRESS EVENT SCHEDULE:

Date: Monday, April 1, 2024

Time: 10:00 a.m. (local time)

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NASHVILLE

Location: Metro Nashville Police Department, General Services Building, 1417 Murfreesboro Pike, Nashville, TN 37217

Contact: Joel Brisson at Joel.Brisson@tn.gov or 615-708-5004

Speakers:

- Jason Ivey – Deputy Director, THSO
- Andrew Perez – Sergeant, THP Nashville District
- Raymond Jones – Captain, Metro Nashville Police Department
- Megan Cooper – Public Relations & Government Affairs Consultant, AAA – The Auto Club Group
- Vanderbilt University Medical Center

MEMPHIS

Location: Shelby County Sheriff's Office Substation, 11670 Memphis Arlington Road, Arlington, TN 38002

Contact: Michael Presson at Michael.Presson@tn.gov or 615-209-1912

Speakers:

- Buddy Lewis – Director, THSO
- Joe Terry – Captain, THP Memphis District
- Don Crowe – Assistant Chief, Memphis Police Department
- Dale Lane – Chief, Collierville Police Department
- Shelby County Sheriff's Office

CHATTANOOGA

Location: THP Chattanooga District 2 Headquarters, 4120 Cummings Highway, Chattanooga, TN 37419

Contact: Aaron Loden at Aaron.Loden@tn.gov or 423-421-3696

Speakers:

- Steve Dillard – Senior Law Enforcement Liaison, THSO
- Alex McKeithan – Regional Program Manager, NHTSA Region 4
- Cecil Harvey – Sergeant, THP Chattanooga District
- Austin Garrett – Sheriff, Hamilton County Sheriff's Office
- Celeste Murphy – Chief, Chattanooga Police Department
- Erlanger Health System

KNOXVILLE

Location: THP Knoxville District 1 Headquarters, 1755 Neals Commerce Lane, Suite 1, Knoxville, TN 37914

Contact: Armando Fontes at Armando.Fontes@tn.gov or 423-237-2197

Speakers:

- Armando Fontes – Law Enforcement Liaison, THSO
- Richard Conatser – Sergeant, THP Knoxville District
- Tom Spangler – Sheriff, Knox County Sheriff's Office
- Mark Fortner – Chief, Knoxville Police Department
- Brian Daley, MD – University of Tennessee Medical Center
- Stephanie Milani – Public Affairs Director, AAA – The Auto Club Group

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The Tennessee Highway Safety Office (THSO) is a division of the Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security advocating for traffic safety. The THSO works in tandem with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to implement statewide programs addressing occupant protection, impaired driving, speed enforcement, pedestrian and bicycle safety, and crash data collection and analysis. Programs administered by the THSO are 100 percent federally funded. The THSO's mission is to effectively develop, implement, and evaluate these programs. To learn more, please visit www.tntrafficsafety.org.