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| |  | | --- | |  | | |  |  | | --- | --- | | **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** December 20, 2019 | **MEDIA CONTACTS:** Dan Tierney: 614-644-0957  Jill Del Greco: 614-644-0957 |  ****Fatalities on Ohio Roads Increase in 2019**** Ohio State Highway Patrol to Focus on Distracted Driving Over Holidays;Governor DeWine Challenges Ohioans to Drive Without Distractions  (COLUMBUS, Ohio) – Ohio Governor Mike DeWine announced today that deaths caused by traffic crashes on Ohio’s roads this year have increased over 2018, making 2019 one of the deadliest years on Ohio roads during this decade.   |  | | --- | | A total of 1,119 people have been killed in traffic crashes in Ohio this year to date, as compared to 1,068 traffic deaths during the entire year of 2018. Overall, traffic fatalities have increased in five of the past six years.  “Distracted driving involving smartphones is, without a doubt, a major contributing factor to this increase in traffic fatalities, which is why I’ve asked the Ohio State Highway Patrol to increase enforcement of distracted driving violations over the holidays,” said Governor DeWine. “As we launch into one of the busiest travel times of the year, the way we drive will impact how many people are home for the holidays and how many people ring in the new year.”  According to the Ohio State Highway Patrol, more than 91,000 distracted driving crashes occurred in Ohio from 2013 to today resulting in more than 47,000 injuries. A total of 305 people were killed in distracted driving crashes during the same period. Because drivers don’t always admit to distracted driving, the actual number of distracted driving crashes, injuries, and deaths are believed to be significantly higher.  “I’m challenging everyone to put your smartphones away while you drive over the holidays and to make it your New Year’s resolution to drive without distraction every day going forward,” said Governor DeWine. “If you have a passenger, ask them to read or write texts for you, or if you are the passenger, speak up if you see your driver reaching for the phone.”  Parents are also encouraged to take time to talk with their young drivers about driving distractions. Between 2013 and 2018, Ohioans age 16-20 had the highest number of distracted driving crashes, followed by drivers between the ages of 21-25.  Ohio law bans the use of any electronic wireless communications devices for drivers under 18. Texting while driving is illegal for all drivers but is a secondary offense for drivers 18 and above.  In addition to smartphone distractions, distracted driving includes any non-driving activity with the potential to distract a person from the primary task of driving and increase the risk of crashing. Distractions can be visual, taking eyes off of the road; manual, taking hands off the wheel; or cognitive, taking the mind off driving. Texting while driving is an example that results in all three types of distraction.  The increased distracted driving enforcement by the Ohio State Highway Patrol will occur in addition to the patrol’s enhanced focus on impaired driving in December as part of National Impaired Driving Prevention Month.  ODOT will also use their digital highway message boards over the holidays to promote safe driving and remind drivers of the dangers of distracted driving and impaired driving. | | | –30– | |