



# AMHERST POLICE DEPARTMENT

21 ACADIA STREET • AMHERST, NOVA SCOTIA • B4H 4W3 • (902) 667-7227 • FAX: (902) 667-0268

The Amherst Police Department is examining ways to enhance service to the town and citizens by providing education and enforcement of the Nova Scotia Motor Vehicle Act and its related statutes. Starting this month, our Department will focus on several awareness initiatives throughout the year. The overall goal is to ensure that roads are safe in our community.

For the month of April our Department has decided to focus on distracted driving. On April 11<sup>th</sup>, APD and its partners will be doing an information checkpoint on Robert Angus Drive. Throughout the month, the Department will also be doing strict enforcement on motorists observed operating a cellphone while driving.

Distracted driving includes any activity that diverts the attention of the driver while operating a motor vehicle. It only takes a couple of seconds of inattentiveness to cause a major collision on the roadway. Last year, distracted driving became the leading cause for fatal collisions in the Province. This means that distracted driving surpassed speeding and impaired driving as the cause of most fatal collisions. This article is not attempting to minimize the scope that speeding or drinking and driving has on our roads, because these issues are still problems. The problem is that with the increase in cell phone usage in Canada, distracted driving issues has also risen. Distracted driving fatalities have increased by 17% from 2006 to 2010 in Canada. In Nova Scotia, talking or operating a cellphone while driving is illegal under section 100D(1) of the Motor Vehicle Act. The fine for a first offence is \$176.45. Statistics show that you are four times more likely to be in an accident if you talk on a phone while driving. This increases to 23 times more if you are texting while driving. If someone needs to make a call on a cell phone, pull over to the side of the roadway. Better yet, use a hands free device which will allow you to handle calls with minimal distractions.

Often the threat of a fine has done little to stop motorists from talking or texting on their cellphones. Two months ago our officers conducted a cell phone enforcement operation and ended up writing 10 summary offence tickets over a 90 minute span. Ten SOTS over an hour and a half period shows that there is a definite distracted driving problem happening in our community.

I do want to point out that cell phone usage isn't the only distraction that causes motor vehicle collisions. Some other common distractions would be:

- Taking your eyes off the road and looking at a navigational device.
- Pets can cause distractions especially when they are jumping onto the drivers laps.
- Mp3 players or similar devices.
- Eating food.
- Smoking in a vehicle.
- Reading maps or books
- Personal grooming.
- Emotionally charged conversations should also be minimized as these arguments could cause the driver to become distracted.

- Motor vehicle accidents. Everyone is naturally curious when they come upon an accident, however, drivers should be aware that these accidents usually have a variety of people on or near the roadway, whether it be emergency service personnel or victims of the crash.

A few years ago I stopped a vehicle on the highway at that was travelling 130 km/h. As I followed the vehicle with my emergency lights on, I could tell that the driver was unaware that I was there. I observed that this male driver was reading something in his lap, smoking a cigar with one hand and eating sunflower seeds with the other. (A definite recipe for disaster).

While driving, your primary focus should be in the safe operation of that vehicle. Driving has become such a common occurrence in our daily lives that we have forgotten that we are operating a heavy piece of machinery and hurling it down the roadway at fast speeds.

Distracted driving is only one part of Amherst Police Department's overall strategy to help reduce collisions on our roadways. Look out for similar operations targeting issues such as seatbelt usage, impaired driving and bike helmets safety in the future.