



## Driving Impaired and Distracted – A Threat to All Roadway Users:

People who drive distracted or who drink and drive put everyone on the road in danger. Anything that takes your eyes off the road, or distracts attention from your surroundings, increases your risk of being involved in a collision with potential deadly consequences. On June 19, 2012 the RSTF held a meeting focused on reducing impaired and distracted driving in the Delaware Valley. We want to share key findings with the broader range of people improving safety.

### Regional Crash Statistics

In 2010, there were 4,476 crashes in the region, which led to the deaths of 99 people and another 3,092 people injured in crashes where someone was driving impaired by alcohol consumption. Impairment can also be caused by illegal or legal drugs or even tiredness; however alcohol use is most commonly measured. Impaired driving, walking, or bicycling due to alcohol was a contributing factor for 28 percent of the annual traffic fatalities in the Delaware Valley, on average, for years 2008 to 2010. The highest number of fatalities in which impaired driving was a factor occurred in Philadelphia, where 29 people died per year on average. In Chester County, approximately 13 people died per year, but that was over 39 percent of its traffic fatalities.

### Key Findings

#### Distracted driving includes:

- Cognitive distractions – speaking hands-free on a cell phone, focusing on conversation or others in vehicle
- Physical distractions – looking for a phone, drinking, eating
- Cognitive and physical – texting, using a navigation system, watching a movie
- ★ In the five-county Pennsylvania region, alcohol-related crashes are down; however drug-related crashes are up.
- ★ Police officers risk their lives enforcing sober driving laws, however many tickets are reduced by plea bargaining to less meaningful charges. In Pennsylvania, while first-time offenders may appropriately be diverted to educational programs, the numbers that follow paint a startling picture.
  - In 2011, there were 56,774 DUI cases, up from 45,656 arrests in 2007.
  - In 2011, there were 28,491 DUI convictions, of which 15,875 were for repeat offenders.
- ★ Pennsylvania recently enacted no texting laws.
- ★ Two proposed bills (A1074 and S1616) in the New Jersey

Legislature would make distracted driving a criminal charge due to a driver's cell phone use.

- ★ New Jersey is one of the few states in the nation where impaired driving is not a criminal charge.

### Practical Strategies to Reduce Impaired and Distracted Driving

RSTF members are doing the following tasks and would be happy to share our experiences with others interested in trying them.

- ★ Educational Strategies
  - Publicize other agencies' impaired and distracted driving programs on your agency's website.
  - Provide a summary from study conducted to determine the effectiveness of New Jersey's cell phone and texting laws.
  - Summarize existing messaging campaigns for reducing impaired and distracted driving, and look for opportunities to collaborate, resulting in more effective communication.
  - DVRPC will work with partners to prepare a two-page summary of what happens after a police officer writes an impaired driving ticket in Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

### How Do I Learn More?

Reducing distracted and impaired driving is one of seven key emphasis areas identified in the *DVRPC Safety Action Plan*, which contributed to 95 percent of the traffic fatalities in the region, for the period 2008 to 2010. **For more information go to [www.dvrpc.org/Transportation/Safety](http://www.dvrpc.org/Transportation/Safety). You will also find prior RSTF meeting highlights and presentations there. The next meeting will focus on "Reducing Aggressive Driving." Contact Regina Moore, RSTF Meeting Coordinator, at [rmoore@dvrpc.org](mailto:rmoore@dvrpc.org) for the next meeting date.**