

# ORANGE CONES. NO PHONES.

## Northern Virginia Law Enforcement: Texting While Driving Most Dangerous Driver Behavior in Construction Zones

### A National Epidemic<sup>1</sup>

Distracted driving is a national epidemic. Nearly 15 people die each day in the United States in crashes that involve distracted driving and another 1,200 are injured. In 2009, more than 5,400 people were killed and an additional 448,000 were injured in crashes that were reported to involve driving while distracted. Among those killed or injured in these crashes, nearly 1,000 deaths and 24,000 injuries included cell phone use as the major distraction. Despite the risks, 40 percent of drivers report using a cellular phone while driving.

### A Commonwealth under Construction

Distracted driving is always dangerous, but distracted driving in a constantly changing work zone is exceptionally dangerous. The Commonwealth of Virginia is in the middle of an unprecedented transportation infrastructure upgrade. Construction on the 495 Express Lanes is fully underway along a 14-mile stretch of the Beltway in Virginia from the Springfield Interchange to just north of the Dulles Toll Road. The project includes the replacement of more than \$260 million of aging infrastructure including 58 bridges and overpasses.

State and local law enforcement play an important role in keeping construction zones safe for drivers and workers. To better understand what officers on the front lines see as the most dangerous driving behaviors and to understand the impact of distracted driving in work zones, Transurban-Fluor and AAA Mid-Atlantic surveyed 402 law enforcement officers in Northern Virginia in March 2012.



### Distractions are Dangerous

Law enforcement officers are most concerned about cell phone use in construction zones. Thirty-two percent of law enforcement officers say texting is the most dangerous driver behavior in construction work zones. This is more than double speeding (13 percent) and aggressive driving (14 percent).

As a result, the number of incidents is increasing. Seventy-eight percent of law enforcement officers surveyed said that the number of crashes and/or incidents has increased since they joined the police department.

Drivers are still texting, despite the dangers. Law enforcement officers estimate that 40 percent of drivers operating their vehicles in a construction zone are using a cell phone.

<sup>1</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/features/dsdistracteddriving/>

## Distracted Driving Causes Crashes

When asked to identify the primary cause of traffic crashes and/or incidents, which they had responded to in construction zones, 34 percent of officers said cell phone use.

Removing distracted driving from the equation would significantly improve safety in construction zones. Seventy-nine percent of those surveyed said that if cell phone use (including texting) while driving was eliminated, the number of crashes they respond to would dramatically decline.

Essentially, three out of four officers surveyed indicated that eliminating cell phone use while driving would dramatically reduce the number of traffic incidents, compared to only about half of the officers indicating that eliminating driving under the influence would dramatically reduce the number of incidents.

Driving under the influence is socially unacceptable - driving while using a cell phone should be too.

## A Safe Work Zone

Safety is the number one priority for 495 Express Lanes project partners. More than 1,100 employees and subcontractors report to work each day in the 495 Express Lanes construction zone. Since 2008, these workers have logged 7.3 million hours.

Safety programs like Orange Cones. No Phones., and construction partner Fluor-Lane's, "Zero Accident" Safety Culture and aggressive safety program largely contributed to the 495 Express Lanes' exceptional safety record. Currently, the 495 Express Lanes has 4.1 million safe work hours without a lost-time accident, and is far-exceeding national industry standards, despite facing challenging working conditions such as:

- Building in a limited construction footprint, resulting in work that must occur next to or atop the heavily traveled I-495 and busy surrounding local roads
- Extensive night work in order to complete major construction activities safely and with minimal disruptions to traffic

## More Information

For more information about Orange Cones. No Phones., visit [orangeconesnophones.com](http://orangeconesnophones.com).

## Work Zone Safety Tips<sup>2</sup>

- Stay alert – Expect anything to occur when entering a work zone
- Pay close attention – Signs and work zone flaggers save lives
- Turn on your headlights – Workers and other motorists must see you
- Don't tailgate – Unexpected stops frequently occur in work zones
- Don't speed – Note the speed limits in and around the work zone
- Keep up with traffic flow – Dedicate your full attention to the road and those traveling around you
- Don't change lanes in the work zone – The time saved just isn't worth it
- Minimize distractions – Avoid changing radio stations and using cell phones



<sup>2</sup> Virginia Department of Transportation, <http://virginiadot.org/programs/prog-wzsa-tips.asp>