

HB 117 is the Right Answer to Governor Abbott's Call for a Consistent Statewide Policy on the Crisis of Distracted Driving

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Several bills have been filed in the Texas House and Senate to either discourage or encourage distracted driving. Should the legislature choose to make a single statewide standard for modifying driver behavior, it is essential to understand how many more or less people may die, suffer injuries, or face financial consequences of crashes caused by driving while using a cell phone.

Texas leads the nation in traffic deaths. Every day ten people die in Texas – and fifty people suffer incapacitating injuries such as losing a limb or permanent brain damage – as an ongoing consequence of the current arrangement of our transportation system, policies, and priorities.

A statewide ban on driving while you are using a cell phone is needed.

TXDOT spends millions of dollars every year on marketing efforts to discourage distracted driving. Passing legislation to legalize distracted driving is in opposition to these efforts.

The people of Texas care what our state leadership think. Not only would SB 15 ban local attempts to reduce deaths and serious injuries from distracted driving crashes, it would tell

the people of Texas that our elected leaders think distracted driving – that kills somewhere between 450 and 981 (possibly more) Texans every year – is a good idea.

The state of Texas should take more responsibility for its actions. To do so, we must better understand the costs – in terms of life, limb, and financial costs – imposed by various policy decisions.

How many people die in Texas every day because of distracted driving?

Unfortunately today we have very poor data on the extent of the crisis of distracted driving - a problem not unique to Texas.

We have inconsistent policies across police departments and jurisdictions across the state on recognizing and reporting distracted driving.

Some counties and cities have shown tremendous increases in distracted driving crashes in recent years, but these perceived increases are actually explained not by an increase in distracted driving, but because those jurisdictions are now keeping much better records than the rest of the state.

TXDOT compiles this data from

Victims of Distracted Driving

TXDOT Crash Statistics on Distracted Driving

Total deaths 2016
at least 455

Total incapacitating injuries 2016
at least 2,512

Total crashes 2016
at least 109,629

Estimated annual cost for Texans
\$2,105,216,519

Estimates Using National Safety Council Crash Rates

Total deaths caused by driving while texting 2016
~189

Total deaths caused by driving while on the phone 2016
~792

Total distracted driving crashes 2016
~143,512

Estimated annual cost for Texans
\$3,127,832,222

**The cost of distracted driving in Texas
(Using National Safety Council estimated rates)**

		2016	National Safety Council estimate of cost per incident	Estimated total cost for Texas families
Total traffic deaths		3,773		
Caused by texting	5%	189	671,515	126,681,305
Caused by phone calls	21%	792	671,515	532,061,480
All cell phone related		981		
Total Incapacitating Injuries 2016		17,582		
Caused by texting	5%	879	64,981	57,124,797
Caused by phone	21%	3,692	64,981	239,924,148
All cell phone related		4,571		
Total Non Incapacitating Injuries 2016		81,704		
Caused by texting	5%	4,085	64,981	265,460,381
Caused by phone	21%	17,158	64,981	1,114,933,601
All cell phone related		21,243		
Total Possible Injuries and Non Injury Crashes		516,943		
Caused by texting	5%	25,847	5,890	152,239,714
Caused by phone	21%	108,558	5,890	639,406,797
All cell phone related		134,405		
Total annual cost of Texas distracted driving (middle ground estimate)				\$ 3,127,832,222

Middle ground estimate uses national rates of the percent of crashes thought to be caused by cell phone use, assuming rates apply to all types of crash severity.

These percentages are then applied to the total statewide crashes, deaths, and injuries for all crashes in the TXDOT crash statistics report.

It is unclear if the NSC cost data intends for "possible injuries" to be treated as injury or non-injury crash, so to be conservative, the lower number is assigned to these.

across the state into its annual crash statistics reports, including a report on the consequences of distracted driving¹.

At the 2017 Texas Transportation Safety Conference in Irving, hosted by the Texas De-

partment of Transportation and the Texas A&M Transportation Institute, several of the safety countermeasures discussed heavily were to move toward better data collection on distracted driving, among other known data problems.

These suggestions will make it into the new Texas Strategic Highway Safety Plan² to be presented to the Texas Transportation Commission next month.

Any bill related to distracted driving must include giving

The cost of distracted driving in Texas (as currently reported)

	2016	National Safety Council estimate of cost per incident	Estimated total cost for Texas families
Deaths	455	671,515	305,539,325
Incapacitating injuries	2,512	64,981	163,232,272
Non-incapacitating injuries	15,772	64,981	1,024,880,332
Possible injury crashes	21,105	5,890	124,308,450
Non injury crashes	70,164	5,890	413,265,960
Total annual cost of Texas distracted driving (lower boundary estimate)			\$2,031,226,339

Lower boundary estimate uses the TXDOT crash statistics report

on distracted driving, which is thought to under report actual in-

cidents, but includes other distractions beyond cell phone use.

TXDOT and our police the resources and the responsibility to give the people of Texas and our local and state elected officials much better information on the phenomenon of distracted driving crashes.

Given all that we know about the inadequacies of our current data, the annual amount of crashes, deaths, and injuries caused by distracted driving should be treated as a lower boundary estimate if we are trying to estimate what is actually happening across the state.

Another method of trying to understand the extent of this problem for Texans is to use the nationwide rates from National Safety Council estimating the percent of crashes caused by driving while texting and driving while on the phone.

Given that Texas policies and elected officials have generally encouraged distracted driving more than other states, it is possible that even using this method will under-estimate the actual extent of this problem. So the NSC method can be seen as a middle ground estimate, with an understanding that actual deaths, injuries, and costs of distracted driving in Texas could be even higher.

The methodology to arrive at these estimates are shown on these middle pages and the results are shown on the front.

At least 450 people die in Texas – annually – because of distracted driving, but the actual deaths from just texting and talking on the phone may be more like 981 deaths every year, or 2.68 deaths every day.

As noted above, in general we see five incapacitating injuries for every death for most traffic phenomenon. These are horrible life changing events for the seven families (lower bound estimate) suffering a loss of limb, permanent brain damage or other terrible injury, every single day in Texas - because of distracted driving.

What is the cost to Texans of all of these deaths, injuries, and crashes caused by distracted driving?

The National Safety Council has also produced estimates of the average costs of deaths, injuries, and non-injury crashes³, which we can use to estimate the financial burden of the current functioning of our transportation system on Texas families. The annual financial

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burden for Texas families from distracted driving - from the cases that we know about in the crash reporting system - is just over Two Billion Dollars.

If – as suspected – the actual deaths, injuries, and crashes caused by driving while using a cell phone are much higher, the cost to Texas families – just last year – was more like \$3,127,832,222.

A heavy burden to carry.

¹ http://ftp.dot.state.tx.us/pub/txdot-info/trf/crash_statistics/2016/31.pdf

² <https://www.texasshsp.com>

³ <https://twitter.com/TTI/status/872523934775824385>

**How many more
Texans will die
every year in your
district if HB 171 is
signed into law?**

<http://www.FarmAndCity.org>

About Farm&City

The Texas we love today was built with both the plow and the bustling main street, by a diverse group of people. A new, nonprofit think tank is needed to maintain the best of Texas for all Texans. **Farm&City is committed to high quality urban and rural habitat in Texas in perpetuity.** As we add another 20 million people, we need rigorous analysis, thought leadership, coalition building, dialogue, and serious solutions to address a very long set of issues and opportunities.



We have just launched this organization to serve the people of Texas. Together we can build a more equitable, prosperous, green, healthy, and accessible Texas.

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