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News

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U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood Announces Federal Ban on Texting for Commercial Truck Drivers

U.S Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood today announced federal guidance to expressly prohibit texting by drivers of commercial vehicles such as large trucks and buses. The prohibition is effective immediately and is the latest in a series of actions taken by the Department to combat distracted driving since the Secretary convened a national summit on the issue last September.

“We want the drivers of big rigs and buses and those who share the roads with them to be safe,” said Secretary LaHood. “This is an important safety step and we will be taking more to eliminate the threat of distracted driving.”

The action is the result of the Department’s interpretation of standing rules. Truck and bus drivers who text while driving commercial vehicles may be subject to civil or criminal penalties of up to \$2,750.

"Our regulations will help prevent unsafe activity within the cab," said Anne Ferro, Administrator for the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA). "We want to make it crystal clear to operators and their employers that texting while driving is the type of unsafe activity that these regulations are intended to prohibit."

FMCSA research shows that drivers who send and receive text messages take their eyes off the road for an average of 4.6 seconds out of every 6 seconds while texting. At 55 miles per hour, this means that the driver is traveling the length of a football field, including the end zones, without looking at the road. Drivers who text while driving are more than 20 times more likely to get in an accident than non-distracted drivers. Because of the safety risks associated with the use of electronic devices while driving, FMCSA is also working on additional regulatory measures that will be announced in the coming months.

During the September 2009 Distracted Driving Summit, the Secretary announced the Department's plan to pursue this regulatory action, as well as rulemakings to reduce the risks posed by distracted driving. President Obama also signed an Executive Order directing federal employees not to engage in text messaging while driving government-owned vehicles or with government-owned equipment. Federal employees were required to comply with the ban starting on December 30, 2009.

The regulatory guidance on today's announcement will be on public display in the *Federal Register* January 26 and will appear in print in the *Federal Register* on January 27.

The public can follow the progress of the U.S. Department of Transportation in working to combat distracted driving www.distraction.gov.

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