



NEW STATE LAWS: BUCKLE UP AND DRIVE SAFELY

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

THE LAST TIME THE TEXAS LEGISLATURE was in town, state lawmakers passed new laws governing Texas drivers. Two principle areas of focus were new safety belt laws and prohibitions on distracted driving activities.

Safety Belts

Effective June 1, vehicle occupants of all ages must be secured by a safety belt – whether they are seated in the front or the back seat of the vehicle. Prior to the law’s passage, occupants did not have to wear safety belts if they sat in the back seat. Unbuckled adult passengers in the front or back seat can be issued a citation.

Texas parents should remember that state law now requires children younger than eight years old be in a child safety seat or booster seat unless the child is taller than 4 feet 9 inches. Violators of the child safety seat law face fines of up to \$250 plus court costs.

Distracted Driving

Texas lawmakers also restricted what Texas drivers can do while they are behind the wheel. Legislators acted to prevent distracted driving, which the U.S. Dept. of Transportation defines as “any non-driving activity a person engages in that has the potential to distract him or her from the primary task of driving and increase the risk of crashing.” This includes use of technology such as cell phones, personal digital assistants and other electronic devices.

The National Traffic Safety Administration reported that nearly 6,000 people died in 2008 in crashes involving a distracted driver, and more than half a million were injured. Younger, inexperienced drivers under 20 years old have the highest proportion of distraction-related fatal crashes.

Under a new Texas law, drivers under

the age of 18 are prohibited from using a wireless communication device while operating a motor vehicle.

Texas lawmakers prohibited all Texas drivers from using a wireless communication device in a school zone unless the vehicle is stopped or the device is hands-free. Texas cities and counties enforcing this law will have signs posted at the start of each school zone informing drivers that cell phone use is prohibited. Drivers who violate this law will be subject to a fine of up to \$200. The only exception to this law is if the call made in a school zone is an emergency call.

All Texans should obey these new traffic laws and make our highways safer.

– July 2010

POINTS TO REMEMBER



BUCKLING UP ON TEXANS’ SAFETY

Vehicle occupants of all ages must be secured by a safety belt – front seat and back seat passengers.

- Children younger than eight years old must be in a child safety seat or booster seat unless they are taller than 4 feet 9 inches.
- Drivers under the age of 18 are prohibited from using a wireless communication device while operating a motor vehicle.
- All Texas drivers are prohibited from using a wireless communication device in a school zone unless the vehicle is stopped or the device is hands-free.

To access applicable Texas statutes, log onto www.capitol.state.tx.us.

For more information about this or other topics, visit www.texasattorneygeneral.gov.



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