April is Distracted Driving Awareness Month as designated by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). “Distracted driving is one of the fastest growing safety issues on the roads today. Distracted drivers aren’t just a threat to themselves; they are a danger to everyone else on the road." In addition to normal travel on public roadways, garden employees drive a wide variety of vehicles and equipment; from golf carts, to mowers to trams, trolleys and buses on site. The need for distracted driving awareness and defensive driving techniques is increasingly important whether on public roadways or within the garden.

Distracted driving is defined by NHTSA as “any activity that diverts attention from driving, including talking or texting on your phone, eating and drinking, talking to people in your vehicle, fiddling with the entertainment or navigation system — anything that takes your attention away from the task of safe driving.”

Regardless of distraction type, distracted driving is a serious safety hazard that contributes to a significant number of accidents on the road. In fact, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reported that more than 2,800 people are killed and 400,000 are injured in crashes involving a distracted driver each year—equating to approximately eight deaths and 1,095 injuries per day. Considering these findings, it’s crucial to take steps to prevent distracted driving.

**Driving Demands Your Undivided Attention**

- **Put away your cell phone**: The use of electronic devices on our roadways has changed very little in the last ten years. See results of the National Occupant Protection Use Survey (NOPUS) below.
Plan your trip before you leave. Program your navigation system prior to hitting the road to get familiar with your journey and feel confident in your route.

Secure passengers. Ensure kids are properly situated in car seats (if needed) with seat belts fastened. Keep pets stationary in the back seat.

Avoid multitasking. Never complete additional tasks—such as eating or personal grooming—behind the wheel.

Stay focused. Concentrate your mind on the road by keeping distracting conversations to a minimum and looking straight ahead.

What does Defensive Driving Require?
The National Safety Council defines Defensive Driving as anticipating dangerous situations by taking into account the actions of others and/or the presence of adverse driving conditions. Defensive driving requires the knowledge and observance of local traffic regulations. According to the NSC defensive driving requires:

- A constant alertness for illegal acts or driving errors of other drivers and a willingness to make timely adjustments in our own driving to avoid an accident.
- An understanding and anticipation of adjustments needed while driving due to unusual or changing conditions. Such conditions range from mechanical issues with your own vehicle to road surface, weather conditions, traffic and your own state of mind.
- Thorough knowledge of rules of right of way and willingness to yield right of way to avoid accidents.
- An attitude of confidence that you can drive without having a preventable accident.
Three Basic Steps to driving defensively

- See the hazard: Anticipate what may happen as far ahead of encountering a situation as possible.
- Understand the defense: Familiarize yourself with unusual conditions you may face and learn how to handle them. White out conditions/ icy roads for example.
- Act in time: Once you note a hazard and understand best defense; act as soon as possible.

Work to strengthen your physical ability to focus and concentrate whenever you drive. Some of the biggest hazards we face on the road will come from inside our own vehicle. Just as all roads contain hazards, all commutes have their share of distractions. You can't always avoid them, but through careful planning and training, you can keep from causing crashes and avoid injury to others and yourself.

Resources and additional information:
- NHTSA | National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
- National Safety Council - Save lives, from the workplace to anyplace (nsc.org)

Consult BHS Insurance to make sure your coverage is adequate. For more information, contact a member of the BHS Insurance Public Garden team at 800-350-7676.

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