

Mayor Parker Kicks Off Local No Texting While Driving Campaign

Written by Jeffrey L. Boney, Associate Editor
Wednesday, 03 April 2013 00:00



Mayor Annise Parker utilized the start of National Distracted Driving Awareness Month to kick off It Can Wait, Houston, a local anti-texting while driving public awareness campaign. The mayor's campaign will utilize social media, broad-based community activism and broadcast media to get its message out.

“Not only can we commit to putting the phone down while we drive, we can encourage everybody around us to do the same,” said Mayor Parker. “I refuse to put my life and the lives of others at risk. Please join me in taking the It Can Wait pledge and make a lifelong commitment to never text while driving.”

In 2011, 13 percent of the over 3,000 traffic fatalities in Texas were due to texting while driving. Without a change in the trend, there will be roughly 1.3 million traffic accidents due to texting while driving this year. New research released just last week by AT&T indicates that 43 percent of commuters admit to a “habit” of texting while driving, even though they are aware of the risks. The main risk is that those who text while driving are 23 times more likely to be in a crash.

Mayor Parker's It Can Wait, Houston campaign is an extension of AT&T's national Texting and Driving-It Can Wait movement. The local effort will be guided by a task force consisting of representatives of law enforcement, government, education, corporate, medical, professional and faith-based organizations. The task force members have agreed to not only help get the word out, but also consider developing company or institutional policies that prohibit texting while driving, if such policies don't already exist. Several entities, including the Houston Texans, Dynamo, Rockets, Comcast and AT&T Uverse have agreed to broadcast a public service announcement featuring Mayor Parker and rapper Bun B.

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In addition, the Mayor's Youth Council is working on a competitive video project to get the message to young Houston area drivers. A joint team from the Houston Fire and Police Departments are already conducting workshops in high schools to change the culture of distracted driving among teens.

The state legislature is currently considering a bill that would ban texting and driving statewide. Mayor Parker fully supports this legislation, which won approval two years ago but was subsequently vetoed by Governor Rick Perry. The mayor urged Houstonians to utilize Twitter and Facebook to voice their support for It Can Wait, Houston and for a different outcome in Austin this year. Use the hash tag #itcanwaithou.

If the effort to enact a statewide law fails again, Mayor Parker will move to put in place a local ban on texting while driving. "We have a unique opportunity to change the culture in Houston," said Mayor Parker. "Driving is perilous enough. Texting and driving are a lethal combination. It Can Wait, Houston."

Houston is believed to be the first city in the nation to take this issue on in such a big way.

Confirmed Task Force Members:

- Mayor Annise Parker
- Council Member Jerry Davis, District B
- Council Member Jack Christie, At-Large 5
- HISD - Dr. Terry Grier, Superintendent

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- Aldine ISD - Dr. Wanda Bamberg, Superintendent
- Spring Branch ISD - Dr. Duncan Klussman, Superintendent
- Clear Creek ISD - Dr. Greg Smith, Superintendent
- Katy ISD - Alton Frailey, Superintendent
- Galena Park ISD - Angi Williams, Superintendent
- Deer Park ISD - Dr. Arnold Adair, Superintendent
- Alief ISD - H.D. Chambers, Superintendent
- Sheriff Adrian Garcia
- AT&T - Alice Aanstoos
- Comcast - Ray Purser
- HAR - Dana Kervin
- TSU - Dr. Rudley, President

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- St. Thomas - Dr. Ivany, President
- Rice - Dr. Leebron, President
- Texas Medical Center - Dr. Robbins, President
- Interfaith Ministries - Elliot Gershenson, CEO
- GHP - Arthur Brand
- Univision - Grace Olivares
- CenterPoint - Mark Kollmorgen
- Public Safety Advisory Committee - Dr. Vern Swisher, Chair
- Houston Contractors Association - Richard Peltier, President
- AFL-CIO - Richard Shaw
- METRO - Russ Frank

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- HLS&R - Steve Stevens, Chair
- Houston Rockets
- Houston Dynamo
- Houston Texans
- Police Chief Charles McClelland
- Fire Chief Terry Garrison
- Clyde Peterson