

By Tim Linscott

Managing Editor

Using a smart phone may not be smart while driving.

The proof of this folly is being seen in Perkins County as the accident total for the year is on a record pace.

The vast majority of the accidents this year have been due, in part, to cell phone usage and/or texting.

The trend the last 30 years, according to Don Softley, Grant fire chief, has been an average of eight vehicle accidents a year. In 2013, there have been 12 accidents as of Nov. 1.

“In years when we have an above average year, by October we’d have eight to nine accidents. We are already way above that,” Softley said. “When the first or second ice storm hits you get an accident or two, but this is already above that pace.”

The accidents appear to be more serious as well. On average the local fire and rescue department uses the Jaws of Life twice a year. Already in 2013 the Jaws of Life have been used six times.

“We’ve used them to get a door open on a vehicle or separate the roof to give more passenger space or simply extrication,” Softley said.

In half of the cases the Jaws of Life were used simply to pry the hinges off of a door to get to an accident victim.

The use of these tools are from the way the accidents are happening. Many of the accidents have been involving texting or cell phone usage.

“We are not in the investigation business but when you are in the fire and rescue business, it appears cell phone involvement has been a contributing factor,” Softley said.

The certain types of accidents indicates a cell phone has been in use, where the driver has been distracted or not paying attention to road conditions.

A recent accident north of Grant was a prime example of how a cell phone can be a detriment while driving. Softley explained that while sheriff’s deputies and fire and rescue crews were cleaning up the scene and were diverting traffic, a woman drove past deputies and fire and rescue officials while texting, driving with her elbows the entire way through the detour.

“She wound up slamming on her brakes and about rear-ended a cattle trailer,” Softley said. “It is so dangerous, we about had another accident right there.”

Teens have nationally been statistically susceptible to accidents while driving and texting, but Softley reports that the accidents this year involving text messaging have been a gambit of age ranges.

“It is not one age demographic that has had an accident,” Softley said, mentioning only one accident this year involved a teen. “We all need a reminder to be aware of our surroundings and not text and drive.”

Ways to avoid texting and driving are simple, according to AT&T:

- Put the phone in a glove box or under the seat, using an ‘out of sight, out of mind’ mentality.
- Put the phone on silent mode to avoid even hearing the chime of a text coming in or incoming call ring tone.
- Do not send a text to someone you know is driving. Wait to call when you know they are at their destination.
- If you must answer or send a text, pull off to the side of the road safely, take care of sending

or receiving the text or call and then put the phone away.

Being a defensive driver is also essential to preventing an accident. Be aware of drivers texting and driving approaching on the highway or in front or behind a vehicle.

Texting and Driving-The Stats

www.textanddrivingsafety.com

- In 2011 at least 23 percent of auto collisions involved cell phones, equalling 1.3 crashes.
- Five seconds, the minimal time it takes away your vision from the road while texting, driving at 55 miles per hour, equals driving blindly for the length of a football field.
- A total of 13 percent of all drivers ages 18-20 involved in a wreck said they were texting or talking on a cell phone at the time of the accident.
- A total of 77 percent of young adults claim they are 'very' or 'somewhat very' comfortable that they can text safely and drive.
- A total of 55 percent claim it is easy to drive and text.
- A total of 27 percent of adults have sent or received a text while driving.
- Thirty-nine states, Nebraska included, prohibit drivers from texting while driving. However, in Nebraska it is a secondary offense, meaning law enforcement officials cannot pull someone over for simply texting and driving.
- Thirty-two states, including Nebraska, prohibits novice drivers from cell phone use while driving.
- Annually 1.6 million accidents are caused while drivers are texting, which is 25 percent of all vehicle accidents in the U.S. ~ National Safety Council
- Eleven teens a day die from texting and driving. ~Insurance Institute for Highway Safety Fatality Facts
- Texting and driving is six times more likely to cause an accident than driving intoxicated. ~ National Highway Transportation Safety Administration
- Driving and texting is the same as driving after four beers for reaction time. ~ National Highway Transportation Safety Administration
- Texting and driving slows brake reaction speed by 18 percent. ~Human Factors/Ergonomics Society