

STAKEHOLDERS WORKSHOP ON DISTRACTED DRIVING

COMMUNIQUE

A workshop on distracted driving with the theme "Driving and Mobile Phones: Issues, Challenges and Intervention Strategies" held on Tuesday 29th November 2011 under the aegis of the ARRIVE ALIVE ROAD SAFETY INITIATIVE (AARSI) and NIGERIAN COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION (NCC). Workshop agreed about the definition of distracted driving as:

Any non-driving activity a person engages in that has the potential to distract one from driving and increases the risk of crashing.

Workshop equally agreed that these distractions can come from several sources manifesting as

1. Taking the eyes off the road
2. Taking the hands off the wheel
3. Taking the mind off driving while on the road

All of which result in the same thing - danger to oneself and other road users

It was agreed that these distractions come from several sources including trying to read road signs, admiring things (rightly and wrongly) etc

Grievous as these distractions and impediments are, they are being heaped on the already poor state of our roads country-wide, the often less than satisfactory state of our vehicles and our unskilled drivers, who in their ignorance believe they know it all. Workshop equally took note of the arrogance of the big man who is above the law and the law enforcement agent who is thereby cowed.

Workshop however concentrated on the distraction caused from the usage of cell phones.

While lauding and applauding the many uses and advantages of the GSM phone for its salutary uses, workshop noted that the cell phone is a huge distraction to any driver. Even looking for a ringing phone is distractive. SMS writing (including the Blackberry Version) is the worst of distracted driving issues. This is because texting involves all three types of distraction. To send an SMS, a driver has to take the eyes off the road, use fingers to type and therefore take the hands off the wheel and the mind off driving.

It was established and reiterated that the use of a phone whilst driving is an offence created by Part 11 section 10 subsection 4 (ff) of the FRSC Act 2007. The National Road Traffic Act 2004 section 80 and the National Highway code lend additional bite to this law. Over and above the provisions of the enabling laws however, workshop advises and recommends as follows:

ROAD USERS

- Road users to desist from multi tasking whilst driving
- Hands-free devices are not recommended because both listening and talking are equally distracting.
- Pedestrians advised to avoid the use of cell phones whilst walking along the road

TELECOMS OPERATING COMPANIES

- Massive and sustained public enlightenment on the dangers of distracting driving especially with respect to the use of cell phones was seen as a duty for the TELCOMS. This was advised in as many Nigerian languages as possible
- One of the TELCOMS promised to explore the possibility of "I am driving" ring back tones
- Operators were advised to add Anti distracting driving messages to balance enquiries response
- Due to the negative effect of free night calls on the road using subscriber, it was advised that these be replaced by free weekend calls as incentives to subscribers

GOVERNMENT

- It was established that less than 20% of licensed drivers know how to drive and the percentage of drivers who are not licensed is unknown.

- Government, other employers and insurance companies were advised to pay no driver liability compensation in accidents and even deaths arising from proven cases of driving negligence.
- The leadership at all levels, especially in government and the Forces, should mentor the populace by not infringing existing laws and conventions on distractive driving
- The present laws on distractive driving (ex. phone usage on the wheel) are too lenient and should be made more deterrent. However, responsibility (personal discipline) should be promoted over enforcement in public enlightenment campaigns

PROSPECTIVE

- While urging specific interactions with individual TELCOs, the TELCO's were urged to bring forth suggestions on solving the problems
- Quarterly interactive stake holders meetings on the issue of distractive driving were encouraged
- Future meetings should involve the legislative arm of government, representatives of NURTW amongst others