

THE SHERIFF'S SIGNAL

A National Traffic Safety Brief to Support Safe Roads and Strong Communities



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DRIVING THE FUTURE: TECHNOLOGY'S IMPACT ON TRAFFIC SAFETY

Technology is transforming traffic safety at an unprecedented pace. From real-time data and advanced analytics to automated enforcement tools and cutting-edge vehicle innovations, today's technology is reshaping how law enforcement agencies prevent crashes, protect communities, and save lives.

KEY SAFETY METRICS AND TRENDS

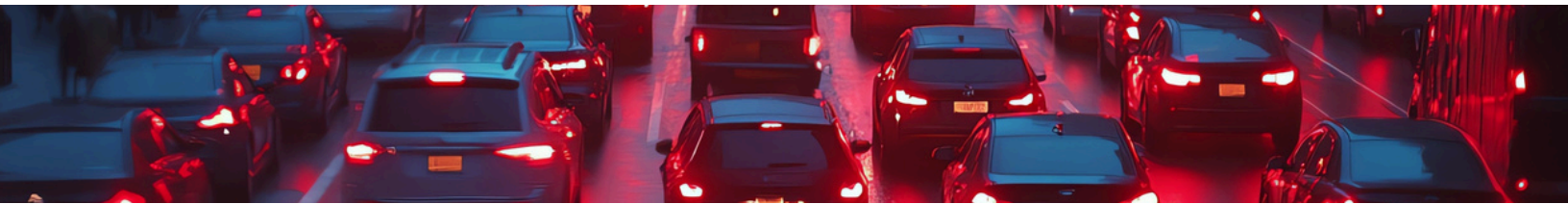
Trending Down: Distracted Driving Declines Under Strengthened Law

Cambridge Mobile Telematics (CMT) recently released a statewide analysis showing that Ohio drivers use their phones less frequently than the national average. Data collected from January through December 2025 found that U.S. drivers averaged 23.6 phone taps per 100 miles, while Ohio drivers averaged 21.9, **7.2% lower** than the national rate. Learn more [here](#).

Preliminary 2025 data shows traffic deaths fell 3% compared to 2024, marking a fourth straight year of decline. The decrease in distracted driving is believed to be a significant contributing factor to this continued decline.

Cambridge Mobile Telematics

The findings follow Ohio's strengthened distracted driving law. In 2023, Governor Mike DeWine signed legislation that generally prohibits drivers from using or holding a cell phone or other electronic device while driving on Ohio roads.



The Road Ahead: Law Enforcement's Role in the Age of ADS

As we move into a future where automated vehicles are becoming more common on our roadways, it is increasingly important for law enforcement officers to understand how to safely and effectively interact with them. Whether responding to an emergency, conducting a traffic stop, investigating an abandoned vehicle, or securing a crash scene, knowing how automated driving systems operate is critical to maintaining officer and public safety.



As more research and guidance are released, agencies have access to practical information tailored specifically to real-world law enforcement encounters, including **how to safely stop a self-driving vehicle** and how to manage interactions with automated driving systems during routine and high-risk situations.

In 2025, law enforcement and government offices collaborated to publish **Public Safety Considerations for Automated Driving Systems (ADS) Deployment**. The report underscores that "law enforcement should play a role in developing the governance of ADS-dedicated vehicles," including engaging with lawmakers, helping shape safety standards and operational guidelines, and developing training to prepare officers for this rapidly evolving technology.

Additional resources are also available, including **First Responder Interactions with Fleet-Managed Automated Driving System-Dedicated Vehicles (ADS-DVs)**, released by the Automated Vehicle Safety Consortium, which provides further guidance to support safe and informed field response.

EDUCATION AND ENFORCEMENT

LEADERSHIP THAT SAVES LIVES: SHERIFF WEISBURN'S IMPACT ON DISTRACTED DRIVING

By Connie Deibel, Stark County Sheriff's Office

Phones Down. It's the Law.

Just like drunk driving, distracted driving is a serious and preventable danger on our roads. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 3,275 people lost their lives in the U.S. in 2023 due to distracted driving.

Ohio's distracted driving law, enacted in April 2023, prohibits drivers from holding or using any electronic device while operating a vehicle. Hands-free and single-touch interactions are permitted, but anything more puts drivers in violation of the law.

Deputies from the Stark County Sheriff's Office in Ohio routinely watch for distracted driving during their everyday patrols—just as they do with other traffic violations. However, they grew increasingly concerned about the number of drivers they continued to see using phones even after the law went into effect. They brought their concerns to Stark County Sheriff Eric Weisburn, and together they developed a targeted enforcement campaign to help combat this dangerous driving behavior.

The operation uses a marked maintenance truck or semi-tractor staffed by two deputies — one driving and one observing traffic as they travel alongside other vehicles. The elevated vantage point of the trucks helps the observing deputy spot violations quickly and easily. When a distracted driver is identified, the observing deputy radios a deputy in a nearby marked cruiser, who then conducts the traffic stop and issues the citation.



“Distracted driving remains a major contributor to serious and fatal crashes, even after the passing of Ohio’s law,” said Sheriff Eric Weisburn. “Our enforcement efforts focus on drivers who continue to choose this unsafe behavior and put others at risk. We will stop and ticket anyone who is driving distracted.”

While Ohio's distracted driving law covers all electronic device use, the campaign focuses primarily on phone manipulation—the behavior deputies most frequently observe and the one that most concerns the Sheriff. “While driving, your one and only focus should be on the safe operation of your vehicle,” said Sheriff Weisburn. “You cannot drive safely unless the task of driving has your full attention. Any non-driving activity you engage in is a potential distraction and increases your risk of crashing.”

This monthly enforcement effort has proven highly effective, resulting in a more than 100% increase in distracted driving citations since its launch. With such strong results, Sheriff Weisburn plans to continue the initiative to help keep Stark County roads safe for everyone.

POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

SELF DRIVE Act of 2026

A new bill introduced on February 6, 2026, would establish the first comprehensive federal statutory framework specifically for autonomous vehicles. The **Safely Ensuring Lives Future Deployment and Research in Vehicle Evolution (SELF DRIVE) Act** would create clear statutory definitions for key terms, including “automated driving system (ADS),” and provide a national structure for oversight. The legislation directs the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to develop updated safety standards for automated vehicles, addressing testing, performance requirements, and cybersecurity protections. Importantly, the bill seeks to create a unified national framework, reducing the current patchwork of state-by-state regulations. The legislation is currently under review.

“The purpose of this Act is to ensure continued United States leadership in the global automotive and autonomous driving sector, improve road safety, mobility, and accessibility, and create American jobs by creating rules and regulations that relate to the design, construction, and performance of ADS-equipped vehicles and by encouraging the testing and deployment of such vehicles.”

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/7390/text>



Consumer Alert: FCA Issues “Do Not Drive” Warning for All Vehicles with Unrepaired Takata Recalls

February 11, 2026

FCA US has issued a serious “do not drive” warning for select Chrysler, Dodge, Jeep and Ram vehicles with open and unrepaired Takata air bag recalls. If your vehicle is affected, it should not be driven until the faulty air bag inflator has been replaced. Repairs are completed free of charge at authorized dealerships.

Although more than 6.6 million FCA air bag inflators have already been replaced, approximately 225,000 vehicles in the U.S. remain unrepaired and may still pose a safety risk.

Click [here](#) to read more and check if your vehicle’s make and model is included.

Death and Injuries Reported by the National Highway Traffic Administration from Deadly Chinese Air Bag Inflators

There is an urgent alert for drivers of vehicles that were previously in a crash in which the airbags deployed. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is investigating replacement airbag inflators manufactured in China that were installed in vehicles in the United States and have been linked to multiple deaths and injuries. For additional details, visit the [NHTSA website](#).

COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Miami-Dade Sheriff Cordero-Stutz Puts the Future in Motion

The Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office is stepping into new territory with the introduction of the nation's first **fully autonomous patrol vehicle**. Nicknamed "PUG," short for Police Unmanned Ground Vehicle, the self-driving cruiser is designed to supplement deputies in the field while expanding the agency's technological capabilities.

Rather than replacing officers, the vehicle is intended to serve as an added layer of visibility and operational support. It can travel along pre-programmed patrol routes, conduct certain traffic enforcement functions and communicate directly with the public through its built-in display systems.



Sheriff Rosie Cordero-Stutz underscored the role innovation plays in modern policing, saying, "It is such an important key piece to provide our community touchpoints and technology that will only make us a safer place to be."

Built by Policing Lab, its features are a deployable drone, thermal imaging, panoramic camera coverage, automated license plate reader capability, audio detection systems, and interactive touch-screen windows.

Officials say the vehicle will primarily operate in designated areas, where high visibility can help deter crime and deliver public messaging. Its digital panels can broadcast alerts, safety information and emergency updates in real time.

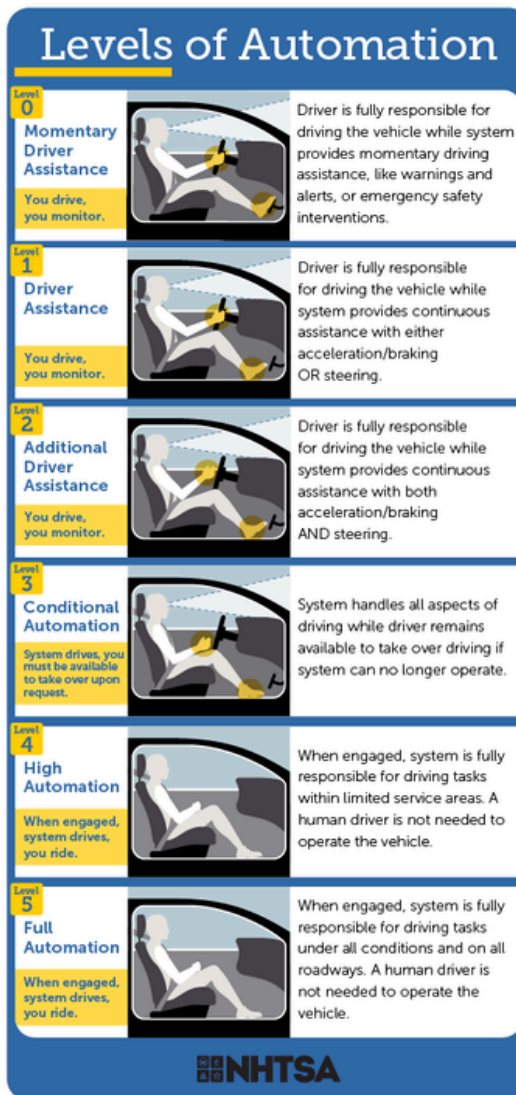
Sheriff Cordero-Stutz also highlighted the vehicle's potential during disaster response scenarios. "Imagine during a hurricane, God forbid, where there is an evacuation area, I got a vehicle that I can just have it in those areas dedicated with information on a banner telling citizens what's going on," she said. "Additionally, we have hotspot areas that need patrols because presence will deter crime, we can dedicate this car to that area."

From routine patrol to emergency management, the debut of PUG signals a broader shift toward **technology-driven policing**. As the program rolls out, South Florida could become an early test case for how autonomous systems integrate into everyday law enforcement operations.

Tools, Technology, and Training

Prevalence of Drowsy & Distracted Driving While Using Partial Driving Automation

Research indicates that driver drowsiness may play a role in up to one in five fatal crashes. Likewise, driver distraction remains a leading factor in motor vehicle incidents. To better understand these risks, the [AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety](#) is collaborating with the [Virginia Tech Transportation Institute](#) to study how Level 2 (L2) automated driving systems influence driver behavior. The [study](#) compares driver actions when these systems are actively engaged versus when they are present in the vehicle but not in use.



Article:
[International collaboration enhances automated vehicle safety tests](#)

Article:
[Des Moines metro cities weigh e-bike, e-scooter rules](#)

Bill: [School Bus Safety Act of 2025](#)

Recruitment in the Age of Innovation

Law enforcement agencies across the country are feeling the pressure of today's staffing shortages. With fewer deputies and growing demands, departments are being asked to do more with less. While pay and scheduling may be outside your control, how your agency operates, and how it plans for the future isn't.

Younger candidates, especially Gen Z, are drawn to organizations that embrace innovation. In fact, industry surveys indicate that **91% of Gen Z candidates say an employer's technological sophistication influences their decision to work there.** For a generation raised in a digital world, modern tools and efficient systems aren't extras, they're expectations.

Agencies that **invest in forward-thinking technology** not only improve daily operations, they position themselves as employers of choice for the next generation of law enforcement officers.

EVENTS

PUT THE PHONE AWAY OR PAY

As part of National Distracted Driving Awareness Month, NHTSA will run its **Put the Phone Away or Pay** high-visibility enforcement campaign **April 6–13, 2026**. The campaign underscores the deadly and legal consequences of distracted driving and is backed by increased law enforcement nationwide. Access materials and get involved [here](#).



NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION (NHTSA) PUBLIC MEETING

NHTSA formally announced a **public meeting scheduled for March 10, 2026** to update stakeholders on the agency's ongoing work around automated driving systems (ADS) and collect input on potential future guidance, testing, and deployment practices. This reflects NHTSA's active role in shaping how AV technology evolves safely.



Click It or Ticket

This May, the “**Click It or Ticket**” campaign returns with a clear message: *Click it. Don't risk it.* Nearly **50% of passenger vehicle occupants killed in 2023 were not wearing seat belts.** Led by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, this nationwide initiative combines education and enforcement to reinforce the truth that seat belts save lives. One of NHTSA's latest publications, the **High Five Rural Seat Belt Program Demonstration and Evaluation Report**, highlights the results of implementing Iowa's High Five model to increase seat belt use in rural communities. Read the full instructional guide [here](#).

WHAT'S COMING UP?

Join us in Omaha, Nebraska for NSA's 2026 Annual Conference! This year's program will feature ARIDE (Advanced Roadside Impaired Driving Enforcement) training, a special Traffic Safety Seminar, and the Traffic Safety Committee meeting. Don't miss it, [register today](#).



Share your Story!

If you have conducted, or are currently engaging in successful enforcement efforts, please let us know. Contact Candace Hill at chill@sheriffs.org to highlight your sheriff's office.