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The Sierra Madre Police Department Participates with the Zero Tolerance Distracted Driving Enforcement Operation

Sierra Madre, CA. – As part of April's *Distracted Driving Awareness Month* campaign, the Sierra Madre Police Department will be actively ticketing those texting or operating hand-held cell phones for the month of April. Drivers who break the law and place themselves and others in danger will be cited with no warnings. The current minimum ticket cost is \$159, with subsequent tickets costing at least \$279. In April 2012, over 57,000 tickets were written statewide for texting and hand-held cell use. There were nearly 450,000 convictions in 2012. Whether it's a ticket or a crash, as the campaign theme states, "It's Not Worth It!"

Distracted driving is a serious traffic safety concern that puts everyone on the road at risk. In recent years, hundreds have been killed and thousands seriously injured in California as a result of collisions that involved at least one driver who was distracted. Nationally, an estimated 3,331 died in 2011. As a result, law enforcement across the state, including the Sierra Madre Police Department are increasingly cracking down on cell phone use and texting. This April will see over 225 local agencies plus the CHP conducting zero tolerance enforcements.

"We all know that talking on our cell phones while driving is distracting, but that doesn't stop some people from continuing to do it," said Sierra Madre Police Chief Larry Giannone. "This effort is intended to educate our community about the dangers of cell phone use while driving. We hope that once people see the statistics and realize the danger involved, they will change their driving habits to help protect themselves, their families, and others on the road."

Drivers who use hand-held devices are four times as likely to get into crashes serious enough to injure themselves. Younger, inexperienced drivers under 20 years old have the highest proportion of distraction-related fatal crashes. In addition, studies show that texting while driving can delay a driver's reaction time just as severely as having a blood alcohol content of a legally drunk driver.

Studies also show that there is no difference in the risks between hands-free and hand-held cell phone conversations, both of which can result in "inattention blindness" which occurs when the brain isn't seeing what is clearly visible because the drivers' focus is on the phone conversation and not on the road. When over one third of your brain's functioning that should be on your driving moves over to cell phone talking, you can become a cell phone "zombie."

To avoid a distracted driving ticket or crash, the Sierra Madre Police Department offers drivers the following tips:

- Turn off your cell phone and/or put it out of reach while driving;
- Include in your outgoing message that you can't answer while you are driving; and
- Don't call or text anyone at a time when you think they may be driving.