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NINTH-ANNUAL ROADWATCH SHINES LIGHT ON DANGEROUS DRIVING NEAR CA SCHOOLS DURING MORNING COMMUTE

Santa Cruz, California

Early in the morning on Oct. 8, young people from 79 Friday Night Live chapters, in 35 California counties, surveyed 96 intersections near high schools and middle schools across the state of California. Youth tallied distracted driving outside their schools for an hour during morning drop off and observed and compiled data on the number of drivers whose attention was occupied by something other than driving.

LOCAL FINDINGS: Santa Cruz County Friday Night Live Partnership youth surveyed five schools: Pajaro, Branciforte and Shoreline Middle Schools along with Soquel and Watsonville High Schools. This year, 11.7% of the 3,593 drivers observed were driving distracted. The top three distractions youth observed were drivers eating and drinking, hand-held cell phone use and passengers engaging with the driver, which caused (9%) of total distractions. Youth implemented targeted campaigns last year to decrease distracted driving and while they are still concerned for their safety in front of schools, the local distracted driving numbers have decreased from 22.7% in 2018.

Statewide Findings: Young people from FNL members observed 16,392 instances of distracted driving in just one hour's time, for an average of over 170 cases of distracted driving per intersection surveyed. That means that at any given minute between 7:00 and 8:00 am, there were at least 273 distracted drivers on California roads. With over 54,000 cars passing through the observed intersections, over 30% of drivers were distracted in some way as they traveled past schools during rush-hour.

Distractions Defined: More than just cellphone use, distracted driving is categorized by California Highway Patrol (CHP) as a range of activities that impact a driver's visual, auditory, physical or cognitive abilities when driving. According to the NHTSA, distracted driving is any activity that diverts attention from driving, including talking or texting on your phone, eating and drinking, talking to people in your vehicle, fiddling with the stereo, entertainment or navigation system—anything that takes your attention away from the task of safe driving.

Texting is the most alarming distraction. Sending or reading a text takes your eyes off the road for 5 seconds. At 55 mph, that's like driving the length of an entire football field with your eyes closed. Any non-driving activity that a driver engages in is a potential distraction and increases your risk of crashing.

At Branciforte Middle School youth witnessed a driver doing the right thing, as she pulled over to the side of the road to text and then put her phone away before continuing. Youth were thrilled that she cared enough about their wellbeing to not text and drive.

The Roadwatch assessment is an engaging way to bring attention to distracted driving and to develop a meaningful commitment from the youth advocates involved. "This assessment activity alone will not be what changes the community," Lynne Goodwin, Program Director of the California Friday Night Live Partnership, said. "The actions that FNL participants take because of this activity is where we will see real change occur."

FNL chapters throughout California work to improve traffic safety in their local communities with funding provided by a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Active in 50 counties statewide, the CFNLP engages young people to become active leaders and resources in their communities. For more information about Friday Night Live, www.visitfridaynightlive.org.

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