Driving While Distracted? **Put *Down* Your Phone!**

It's a fact: drivers who use hand-held devices are more likely to get into crashes. In recent years, many states have enacted laws prohibiting the use of hand-held devices to various degrees in an attempt to cut back on these crashes.

Despite the changes, distracted driving from the use of cell phones remains a major cause of car accidents.

Distracted driving is categorized in three ways:

Visual distraction – taking your eyes off the road
Manual distraction – taking your hands off the wheel
Cognitive distraction – taking your mind off what you're doing and paying attention to something other than driving.

Texting is the most alarming driving distraction because it involves all three of these types of distractions.

What can you do? Put down your phone, even if you're in a state where its use is still legal. No state completely outlaws phones while driving, so if you feel like you have to talk while you're on the road, invest in a hands-free device. This small investment can save you from tickets, accidents, harming others, and harming yourself.

Using a hands-free device is better, but still distracting – your cognitive focus is on the call, not the road. The bottom line is that any distraction is dangerous.

The best thing you can do is avoid using a phone while driving altogether. If you don't have a passenger to make a call for you, pull over for a minute. You might lose a few minutes on your trip time but you can save yourself from disaster.

Oil filter 101: Choosing the right filter for your vehicle

(ARA) - In today's economy it's more important than ever to take care of your vehicle. Engine maintenance is critical when extending the life of your vehicle. There's a lot of information available about the differences in oils and other maintenance components, but what no one explains is what to look for in an oil filter.

The oil filter serves as the lifeblood for your engine. It is important because it cleans the oil and is capable of filtering high volumes of oil with relatively low restriction. How does an oil filter work? And how do you know which one to choose?

The shell is the outside casing you see when the filter is installed. It keeps your filter safe during the wear and tear on your vehicle, and protects it from punctures.

The media is the filtering component. Depending on the level of filter you chose, media can be described as a maze of cellulose, synthetics and/or microfibers that remove the harmful debris from your engine oil.

The core is the part of the filter that helps the filter keep its shape and prevents it from collapsing under extreme pressure. It is inserted inside of the filter media and can be made of a variety of materials.

The base plate is the threaded component of the oil filter. In addition to providing the threaded attachment for the filter, it directs the oil flow through the filter.

The gasket is the rubber ring that seals the filter to the engine's oil filter base. This gasket is typically made of flexible rubber.

Now that you understand the components of an oil filter, it's easy to see that not all oil filters are the same. There are some key differences in the quality of oil filter you are purchasing.

Most "economy" filters are very basic and last for a limited time in comparison to the higher end filters. These filters use media of natural wood fibers to sort out the debris in your oil.

The "better" filter contains media that is a blend of fibers. The majority of the fibers are cellulose with a minimal blend of synthetic fibers that enhance the media strength and efficiency performance.

The "best" or premium level of filters use micro-glass filter technology. Advanced micro-glass oil filters are designed to extend the life of vehicle and equipment. In addition to superior filtration media, the other internal and structural components are of higher quality materials, making for easier installation and removal as they are much less likely to crush while installing or removing.

Vehicles still under warranty should follow the vehicle manufacturer's recommended filter change intervals.