

New rules for the road begin in new year

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LAKE COUNTY – With a new year on the horizon, the California Highway Patrol (CHP) wants to remind motorists of a handful of new laws, passed by the Legislature and signed by Governor Schwarzenegger, that go into effect in 2008.

"These new laws will make California's roads safer for motorists and will strengthen law enforcement's ability to crack down on those who try to skirt the law," said CHP Commissioner Mike Brown.

Below are the major changes to driving regulations and vehicle equipment.

Wireless Telephones (SB 1613, Simitian). This law makes it illegal to use a wireless telephone while driving, unless that phone is designed and configured to allow hands-free listening and talking operation and is used in that manner. The law provides an exemption for emergency purposes. The law banning the use of hand held cell phones by motorists goes into effect July 1, 2008

“Don’t wait until July to get familiar with this law,” said Brown. “A hands-free headset would make a nice gift for the holidays.”

Wireless Telephones, Under 18 (SB 33, Simitian). This law makes it illegal for a minor to use a wireless telephone (even if it’s hands-free) or other mobile service device (any device used to communicate electronically), while operating a vehicle. The law provides an exemption for emergency purposes. This law goes into effect July 1, 2008.

“New, inexperienced drivers don’t need any distractions while behind the wheel,” said Brown. “Results can be deadly.”

The following new laws take effect Jan. 1, 2008:

Smoking with Minor Passengers (SB 7, Oropeza). This law prohibits anyone in a vehicle from smoking when a minor is present. This law applies whether the vehicle is stopped or moving. This is a secondary violation. An officer cannot stop a driver to determine if they’re in violation of this law.

Double Fine Zones (AB 112, Wolk). This new law is Highway 12 specific. It designates the segment between I-80 in Solano County and I-5 junction in San Joaquin County as a Safety Enhancement Double Fine Zone.

Coating License Plates (AB 801, Walters). This new law prohibits the use or sale of a “product” (spray coating) that impairs the reading of a license plate by an electronic devices such as red-light cameras, toll booth cameras and license plate readers.

False Registration (AB 1589, Duvall). This new law, sponsored by the CHP, allows a peace officer to tow a vehicle that is displaying false registration, false license plates or fraudulent registration or registration stickers. Current policy is to cite and only tow if the registration is more than six months out of date.

Electric Personal Assistive Mobility Devices (EPAMD) (AB 470, DeSaulnier). This new law expands on the current law, making it illegal to operate an EPAMD (such as Segways) at an unsafe speed for conditions, in a reckless manner or at a speed that endangers the safety of others. Operators must yield the right-of-way to pedestrians on foot, or disabled persons.

Bicycle Illumination (AB 478, Wolk). The new law now requires a person operating a bicycle during darkness to use lights and reflectors while riding upon a highway, a sidewalk, or a bikeway.

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