

Californians ring in the new year with new traffic safety laws

December 31, 2020



As 2020 comes to a close, the California Highway Patrol wants to highlight some new roadway safety laws that take effect in 2021.

License points for distracted driving (AB 47, Daly; 2019): Using a cell phone in a handheld manner while driving is currently punishable by a fine. Beginning July 1, 2021, violating the hands-free law for a second time within 36 months of a prior conviction for the same offense will result in a point being added to a driver's record. This applies to the violations of talking or texting while driving (except for hands-free use) and to any use of these devices while driving by a person under 18 years of age.

Unattended children in motor vehicles (AB 2717, Chau): Exempts a person from civil or criminal liability for trespassing or damaging a vehicle when rescuing a child who is 6 years old or younger and who is in immediate danger from heat, cold, lack of ventilation, or other dangerous circumstances. The law takes effect January 1.

"Move Over, Slow Down" amendments (AB 2285, Transportation Committee): Extends the provisions of the "Move Over, Slow Down" law currently in place on freeways to also apply to local streets and roads so drivers approaching a stationary emergency vehicle displaying emergency lights, including tow trucks and Caltrans vehicles, must now move to another lane when possible, or slow to a reasonable speed on all highways, not just freeways. The law is effective January 1.

Emergency vehicles (SB 909, Dodd): Allows authorized emergency vehicles to use a "Hi-Lo" warning sound. This distinctive sound, different than a siren, would be used to notify the public of an immediate need to evacuate an area in an emergency. The CHP is currently developing regulations to standardize the Hi-Lo warning sound statewide. Until the regulations are adopted, law enforcement agencies can use the Hi-Lo warning sound by obtaining a permit from the CHP. The law went into effect September 29, 2020.

