



Texas

Department of Public Safety

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NEWS

RELEASE

New Traffic, Criminal Laws Take Effect Sept. 1

AUSTIN – The Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) today highlighted notable traffic and criminal laws that go into effect on Sept. 1, 2013.

“As a result of these new provisions, Texans now have additional protection while traveling our roadways, and individuals who disregard our laws will face tougher penalties for a variety of crimes,” said DPS Director Steven McCraw. “DPS encourages all residents to educate themselves about the laws affecting their lives and to do their part in keeping Texas safe.”

Please note that the following is not a comprehensive list of all new laws passed by the Texas Legislature.

HB 347 expands the current limitations on wireless communication device (cell phone) use in an active school crossing zone to include the property of a public elementary, middle, or junior high school for which a local authority has designated a school crossing zone. The use will only be restricted during the time a reduced speed limit is in effect for the school crossing zone. Further, it will not apply to vehicles that are stopped, or drivers using a hands-free device or making an emergency call.

HB 1174 amends current statute to increase the minimum fines for the misdemeanor offense of passing a stopped school bus loading or unloading children. The minimum fine increases from \$200 to \$500, and the maximum fine for such an offense increases from \$1,000 to \$1,250. The bill also enhances the penalty for a second or subsequent conviction of that offense committed within five years to a misdemeanor punishable by a minimum fine of \$1,000 and a maximum fine of \$2,000.

SB 181 allows a motor vehicle operator the option of using a wireless communication device (such as a cell phone) to display motor vehicle financial responsibility (proof of insurance) information as evidence of financial responsibility. The display does not constitute effective consent for a law enforcement officer, or any other person, to access the contents of the wireless communication device except to view the financial responsibility information. **This bill is effective immediately.*

SB 510 requires drivers to move over or slow down (as required depending on the roadway) when approaching a stationary Texas Department of Transportation vehicle with its lights activated and not separated from the roadway by a traffic-control device. This provision expands the state's Move Over/Slow Down law, which already requires drivers to yield to tow trucks, police, fire and emergency vehicles. Violators would commit a misdemeanor offense punishable by a fine of up to \$200; punishable by a fine of \$500 if property damage occurs; or a Class B misdemeanor if the violation results in bodily damage.

HB 2304 lowers the population requirement from 2.2 million to one million for counties where sheriffs or deputy sheriffs can be certified by DPS to enforce federal commercial motor vehicle regulations. This will open the opportunity to Bexar, Tarrant and Travis counties.

HB 625 clarifies that the penalty for operating a vehicle on a public highway without displaying the two license plates assigned to the vehicle is a misdemeanor offense punishable by a fine not to exceed \$200.

HB 3668 amends current statute to require the operator of a vehicle involved in an accident that results or is reasonably likely to result in the injury or death of a person to immediately determine whether a person is involved in the accident, and if so, whether the person requires aid, in addition to other existing statutory requirements.

SB 275 increases the penalty for leaving the scene of a motor vehicle accident resulting in the death of a person and failing to render aid from a third-degree felony to a second-degree felony. A second degree felony carries a punishment of two to 20 years in prison and an optional fine not to exceed \$10,000, whereas a third degree felony carries a penalty of two to 10 years in prison and an optional fine not to exceed \$10,000.

HB 1284 increases the penalty for the offense of initiating, communicating or circulating a false report of an emergency (such as a bomb threat) involving an institution of higher education from a Class A misdemeanor to a state jail felony. **This bill is effective immediately.*

HB 124 adds *Salvia divinorum* (unless unharvested and growing in its natural state) – including all parts of the plant, seeds and extracts from a part of the plant – to Penalty Group 3 of the Texas Controlled Substances Act.

HB 2637 provides that an individual fraudulently using identifying information to avoid registering as a sex offender to be punished at the next highest degree felony.