



## *In Defense of Our Local Constabulary*

by John D. Whitaker

For about the 20th time this month, I was driving down Wyoming Boulevard toward CY Avenue this morning and I came by the speed-warning signal near the entrance to Wolf Creek. The sign was madly flashing a speed that reminded me that I was driving well beyond the posted speed limit. When this happens, my first thought is to feel a little annoyed. It was like the sign was nagging me to slow down. That was my first thought. Then I got to thinking about what I do for a living. I represent people who have been injured or killed in car wrecks. Then I felt a little dumb.

I can't drive around Casper without thinking about the car wreck cases I have handled which have occurred at most of the major intersections. Driving to Cheyenne or Sheridan is even worse. I have worked on car wreck cases which occurred on most of the highways in this state. I think about these cases every time I approach one of the accident scenes.

Most people live in a safe little cocoon. They don't think about what the hideous images of a serious car wreck actually look like. Law enforcement must not only see and document these terrible scenes, they have to go clean them up. Then they must notify the families of the victims. Most of you honestly have no appreciation of how terrible these scenes can be. The photographs of these scenes are frequently used as exhibits in the lawsuits that result from these crashes so I see a lot of them. There is an ad running on TV right now with some kids driving recklessly in a Jeep. Then the camera shakes around to simulate a wreck and then it focuses on someone putting a hamburger patty on a grill. The idea here is to imply that a car wreck can turn your body into hamburger. As corny as this sounds, I think it is way too understated. They ought to show everyone what it looks like to butcher an elk.

**The Wyoming State Bar does not certify any lawyer as a specialist or expert. Anyone considering a lawyer should independently investigate the lawyer's credentials and ability, and not rely upon advertisements or self-proclaimed expertise. This informative column is brought to you by John Whitaker who practices personal injury and criminal law throughout Wyoming. He can be reached at [jw@wyojury.com](mailto:jw@wyojury.com) or by calling his office in Casper at 265-6204.**



The point of these public service messages is to get everyone to pay more attention when they are driving. If you sit at any intersection in town waiting for the light to change, just count how many people drive by talking on cell phones. In a recent study from the United Kingdom, researchers found that drivers talking on cell phones were as likely as intoxicated drivers to be involved in an accident. The study also found that an average driver trying to send a text message takes their eyes off the road at least 14 times every 30 seconds to look at the screen or keypad on the phone. In other studies, it has been shown that a driver talking on a cell phone is four times as likely to be involved in an accident and someone text messaging is six times as likely to be involved in an accident than someone who is paying attention and not using a phone.

Seat belts are another no brainer. A recent article from James Madison University found that of every 100 children who die in motor vehicle accidents, 80 would have survived if they had been wearing seat belts. They also said that in a 30 mph collision an unbelted adult weighing 160 pounds can hit the windshield or another passenger in the car with 4800 pounds of force. So, if you are driving around with one of your buddies in the back seat without a seatbelt, be ready for a punch to the back of your head that will hurt a lot more than Iron Mike Tyson's best shot.

In putting these speed reminders around town, the authorities are trying to gently remind all of us to stay awake when we drive. Driving is an inherently dangerous business and it is vital that we keep our heads in the game. The next time you see one of those reminders on the street, slow down and concentrate on what you are doing. If you happen to get a speeding ticket, thank your lucky stars that a speeding ticket is your only problem.