Don’t lose sight of your driving view

By Eric Czarnik

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“Keep your eyes on the road” is a maxim so common that it has become a cliché, but fewer things have been said about clearing away objects that can obstruct a driver’s vision of the road.

Gary Bubar, public affairs specialist from AAA Michigan, said state law forbids people from obstructing the windshield’s field of view.

For instance, hanging items such as air fresheners, leis or dream catchers from the rearview mirror is against the law because of their ability to obscure and distract, he said. Placing objects on the dashboard is also prohibited if they get in the way of fully observing traffic, he said.

“Something as small as the width of a finger can block a pedestrian from your view,” Bubar said. “If you have fuzzy dice hanging over your windshield, that can block that pedestrian — particularly a child.” With summer being a time for vacations and moving to college dorms, it may be tempting to pack cargo up to the ceiling in the backseat. Bubar said it’s technically permissible under the law for a view of the rear window to be obstructed so long as the car has both of its side mirrors attached and functioning. However, Bubar said it’s still a great idea to keep plush toys, umbrellas, pillows and other objects from crowding out the rear window. One reason is that many drivers are dependant on using the rearview mirror; another reason is safety within the car, he said.

“In a crash or a sudden stop, all that stuff that is sitting in the back window become missiles,” he said.

Bubar said tinted windows may obscure vision, and they sometimes are illegal. He said the front windshield, the front passenger window and the front driver’s side window may be tinted only from the top down to 4 inches. He said the law makes sense, given that police officers may have to look through the car windows during a routine traffic stop. Sgt. Sam Marzban, who is in charge of the 416 Traffic Unit at the Oakland County Sheriff’s Office, said he tries to educate drivers when he notices that their line of sight is obstructed. He added that tinted windows may eliminate a way to nonverbally communicate with other drivers and pedestrians, and those windows can reduce nighttime visibility.

“It also reduces the ability to keep a far visual horizon on the roadway and look down the road,” he said. “You don’t want to directly look in front of your vehicle. By the time you perceive a child running in the roadway … you’re not going to be able to (react) if you’re staring in front of your hood.” Learn more about AAA Michigan by visiting www.michigan.aaa.com. Contact the Oakland County Sheriff’s Office by visiting www.oakgov.com/sheriff or by calling (248) 858-5000.