

Distracted Driver Research

Driver distraction occurs when the driver's focus is on something other than the primary task of driving. This increases the risk of driver error and crash involvement. Research shows that drivers who talk on a cell phone while driving are four times more likely to be involved in a crash. Although cell phones attract the most attention, there are many in-vehicle and external sources of driver distraction. In fact, cell phone use is typically associated with lower crash risks than are many other common distracters. For example, reaching for a moving object, interacting with passengers, adjusting entertainment systems, and an outside person, object or event are associated with higher crash risks, according to a Distracted Driving study by the Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation Department.

What is the definition of distracted driving?

- Any activity that takes the driver's attention away from the task of driving.

What actions are classified as distracted driving?

- Eating and drinking
- An outside person, object or event: animal, a crash scene, or road construction
- Adjusting a radio, cassette, compact disc player, I-pod or GPS device
- Other occupant in the vehicle: talking, arguing, or assisting a child
- A moving object in the vehicle: a pet, an insect, or an object falling off the seat
- Smoking related: reaching for, lighting, smoking, or dropping a cigarette
- Cell phone related: dialing, talking, listening, texting or reaching for a cell phone
- Other device brought into the vehicle: reaching for a water bottle, purse or sun glasses
- Using a device integral to the vehicle: adjusting mirrors, lights, or seatbelt
- Other distraction: a medical issue, looking at a map or road sign, sleepy, or fatigue
- Inattentive or lost in thought



Driver distraction has increased nationwide, particularly with the use of cell phones while driving. What factors have led to this current situation?

- Technological advances over the last 20 years
- A perceived need to be connected to work and home at all times
- A perception that driving is an unproductive, second nature task
- People trying to accomplish more in less time
- CTIA-The wireless Association (CTIA) reports that as of December 2007, there were over 255 million wireless telephone subscribers in the United States, comprising 84% of the population. These users spent 2.1 trillion minutes talking on cell phones and transmitted 363 billion text messages during 2008. This is an increase of 23% in subscribers, a 40% increase in annual minutes of use, and a 348% increase in annual text messages compared to the statistics of 2005.

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(Councilmember Phyman)

What are the biggest distractions?

- A newly released study by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute studied long-haul trucks for 18 months by outfitting the cabs with video cameras. They found when the drivers texted, their collision risk was 23 times greater than when not texting. The study also measured the time drivers took their eyes from the road to send or receive texts. In the moments before a crash or near crash, drivers typically spent nearly five seconds looking at their devices – enough time at typical highway speeds to cover more than the length of a football field.
- Nationally and in Florida, distracted driving studies show an outside person, object or event as the greatest distraction.

Who are our distracted drivers?

- Research shows that over half of U.S. drivers report having used a cell phone in the past 30 days.
- One in seven admits to text messaging while driving.
- Forty-six percent of 16 and 17 year old drivers say they text message while driving.
- Forty-eight percent of 18 to 24 year old drivers text message while driving.
- Sixty-seven percent of 25-34 year old drivers talk on their cell phones while driving.
- Sixty-five percent of drivers with a college education talk on their cell phones while driving. The higher the level of education, the higher use of the cell phone.

Is there a difference in the level of distraction if a driver is using a hand-held cell phone versus a hands-free cell phone?

- Studies have shown that the impact of using a hands-free phone on driving performance was not found to differ from the impact of using a hand-held phone. Researchers believe what distracts the driver is the withdrawal of attention from the processing of information in the driving environment while engaging in the cell phone conversation.

How many states have laws limiting the use of cell phones?

- Five states and the District of Columbia have laws banning handheld cell phones for all drivers.
- No state completely bans all types of cell phone use, hand held and hands-free.
- Twenty-one states and the District of Columbia ban all cell use by novice drivers.
- Seventeen states and the District of Columbia prohibit school bus drivers from all cell phone use when passengers are present.

How many states have laws against text messaging?

- Fourteen states plus the District of Columbia.
- Ten states prohibit text messaging by novice drivers.
- One state restricts school bus drivers from texting while driving.

Do other countries restrict or prohibit the use of cell phones while driving?

- Distracted driving, in particular cell phone use while driving, is a traffic safety issue around the world. Internationally, over forty-five countries on all six inhabited continents currently restrict or prohibit the use of cell phones while driving.

What are the attitudes toward cell phone use and distracted driving of the American public?

- In a national telephone survey, respondents were asked about traffic safety issues and asked to rate their seriousness. Overall, 83% of drivers rated distracted drivers and drivers using cell phones as serious or extremely serious problems. Only drinking drivers received a higher rating at 88%. Distracted drivers and drivers using cell phones both rated above aggressive drivers, excessive speeding, and drivers running red lights in terms of public perceptions of their seriousness.

What is the answer to the distracted driving problem?

- Delegates to the 2005 International Conference on Distracted Driving agreed that current laws related to distracted driving do not adequately address the problem. Legislation alone will not effectively address an issue that goes beyond driving issues to lifestyle issues. Based on the available research and experience it is impossible to conclude that a law banning cell phone use will reduce collision rates over the long term. Especially when the evidence suggests that regardless of a law, a large number of people continue to use cell phones while driving.
- Research, awareness, education, and cooperative government-industry efforts are essential over the long term to influence attitudes and reduce collisions resulting from driver distraction.
- Enhanced public education around driver distraction. Focus on educating children and youth
- A concerted effort to change public attitudes toward driving while distracted. Some companies have developed policies banning employees from using cell phones while driving, while on duty. This type of policy may assist in overcoming the attitude that an individual must be connected at all times.

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**Prepared by: Office of Research and Statistics
July 29, 2009**