

Safety Talk

Distracted Driving: Texting While Driving

The number of fatal vehicle crashes on America's roads is increasing due to distractive driving. Distractive driving is becoming a serious public health threat. Most drivers have driven distracted. It could be eating while driving, putting on makeup, looking at maps, changing the radio station, talking on a cellphone or even texting while driving.

The National Safety Council recently released a white paper on "Brain Distraction During Cellphone Use While Driving." This report referenced more than 30 scientific studies and reports. The reports describe how using a cellphone (hands-free or hand-held) requires the brain to multitask – a process it cannot do safely while someone drives. Cellphone use while driving not only impairs driving performance, but also weakens the brain's ability to capture driving cues.

The paper describes how drivers who use cellphones have a tendency to "look at" but not "see" up to 50 percent of the information in their driving environments. A form of inattention blindness occurs, which results in drivers having difficulty monitoring their surroundings, seeking and identifying potential hazards, and responding to unexpected situations.

Most people agree that distractive driving is dangerous. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration recently completed a study that showed that 75 percent of all traffic accidents were preceded by some type of driver distraction. In an effort to reduce distractive driving, more and more states are passing legislation that bans the use of hand-held cellphones while driving. Some states have passed laws that prohibit any person under the age of 18 from using a wireless phone while operating a vehicle. In fact, at least 23 states have passed measures to ban texting while driving.

Studies have shown that the odds of being in a crash while texting are 23 times higher than driving without any distraction. Texting while driving is riskier than driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs. A Virginia Tech Transportation Institute report notes that a driver who texts messages has the longest duration of "eyes off the road" time.

In September 2008, the nation's deadliest rail accident in 15 years occurred when the engineer of a Metrolink commuter train missed a stop signal, killing himself and 24 others when he slammed into a freight train just 22 seconds after sending a text message.

The next time you are tempted to text while driving, keep in mind the growing body of evidence suggesting you should keep your eyes on the road and leave the music, navigation and e-chatting to your passengers. Texting and driving do not mix, and the outcome can be fatal!

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Talking Points

- Distracted driving kills.
- Odds of being in a crash while texting are 23 times higher than driving without any distraction.
- The NHTSA, in full, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, recently completed a study that showed that 75 percent of all traffic accidents were preceded by some type of driver distraction.
- Driver distraction was a factor in 16 percent of all fatal crashes in 2008.
- The National Safety Council estimates that 28 percent of all crashes – or 1.6 million crashes – each year are caused by drivers using their hand-held or hands-free cellphones and/or texting while driving.
- Texting while driving is riskier than driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Motorists texting while driving have response times 35 percent slower than those motorists who are not occupied with texting. Compare to motorists driving legally drunk – they have response times that are 12 percent slower than motorists not under the influence of alcohol.
- A Virginia Tech Transportation Institute report notes a driver who texts messages has the longest duration of “eyes off the road” time, which equates on average to traveling the length of a football field at 55 mph without looking at the road.
- The age group with the greatest proportion of distractive drivers was the under-20 age group – 16 percent of all under-20 drivers in fatal crashes were reported to have been distracted while driving.
- In September 2008, the nation’s deadliest rail accident in 15 years occurred when the engineer of a Metrolink commuter train in Chatsworth, Calif., missed a stop signal, killing himself and 24 others when he slammed into a freight train just 22 seconds after sending a text message.
- In May 2009, a trolley accident that injured 62 people in Boston was caused by an operator who was texting before the collision.
- Texting while driving is illegal in 23 states and the District of Columbia.
- Clearly Americans are becoming more concerned. The Insurance Information Institute reported in an August 2009 survey that 80 percent of respondents support a ban on driver text messaging and 67 percent of respondents support a ban on using hand-held cellphones. As the summer driving season begins, keep in mind the growing body of evidence suggesting you should keep your eyes on the road and leave the music, navigation and e-chatting to your passengers.

>> Safety Training Roster

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Safety Topic:

Discussion Leader:

Print Name:

Signature:

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