

Cell Phones and Driving Safety

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Because distracted driving is a real issue

In many ways, smartphones have made our lives easier. But they can also create a high level of distraction, especially while driving. Using a cell phone while driving is banned in several states including Connecticut, New Jersey, New York and the District of Columbia. Many cities and states are drafting or have drafted legislation that restricts the use of cell phones by driver – especially those under the age of 18.

Drivers should have 100 percent of their attention on one thing – operating the motor vehicle

Research conducted by a professor from the University of Toronto showed that cell phone users were four times more likely to get into traffic accidents than those who were not using cell phones. This is significant considering the fact that National Highway Traffic Safety reports that at any given time of the day:

- Six percent of drivers on U.S. roads were using hand held phones, double the rate that was observed five years prior.
- The highest phone use rate (10 percent) was among drivers 16 to 24 years old.

Text messaging is a growing concern

The National Safety Council states that in one year alone, nearly 6,000 people were killed and more than 500,000 injured in crashes involving a distracted driver.

Teen texting exposures

- On average, teens report texting about 50 times per day.
- One-third of them said they send text messages 100 times per day.
- 15 percent reported sending more than 200 texts messages per day.
- More than one in four admitted texting while driving.

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According to Australian research, the average teen takes their eyes off the road 10 percent of the time to check road signs, change the radio or just look around. When the same teen sends a text message, it jumps to 40 percent – a 400 percent increase in the amount of time that their eyes are off the road.

What about hands-free phones?

Research reflects that hands-free phones don't appear to be a safer alternative, as the driver's attention remains diverted to the topic of the conversation. The main factor in most motor vehicle collisions is a driver's limited attention rather than dexterity. The cell phone industry disputed these findings and of course challenged the study.

A typical call in the study lasted 2.5 minutes. The research found that the risk of an accident was nearly five times higher than normal when a person was on the telephone one minute to five minutes before the accident. The research also indicated that the highest risk was among people who had not graduated from high school.

Safety tips for all cell phone users, including businesses

- Establish a written policy that cell phones are not to be used while operating any vehicle on company business. This policy should extend to personal use of company vehicles as well.
- Require that all employees who drive any vehicle for company business, including hired and non-owned vehicles, sign a written acknowledgment of this policy.
- Use your cell phone only when parked, or have a passenger use it.
- Never dial the phone or take notes while driving.
- If your phone rings while driving, let it go to voice mail and listen to the message later when you are parked.
- Make sure the phone is easy to see and reach, but only for use in an emergency.
- Get to know your phone and its features (such as speed dial and redial).

Source: NHTSA.gov

Drive smart and safe

Remember, a call or text can wait. Using a cell phone while driving may lead to an increased risk of being involved in an auto accident through a lack of driver attention. Simply put, don't drive and dial. Pull off the road and come to a complete stop before using your cell phone. You just might be saving someone's life, including your own.

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