

To The Point Distracted Driving

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We've all seen them—people driving down the road reading the newspaper, putting on makeup, or concentrating on a cell phone conversation. Those are the most obvious examples of driver distraction. What may surprise many people is the number of other things we do in our cars that take attention away from the primary task of driving.

Distracted Driving Statistics

Driving is a risky activity. Each year, more than 40,000 people are killed in motor vehicle crashes and over 3 million are injured. Research indicates that driver distraction is a contributing factor in 25 to 50% of all crashes, causing an estimated 4,000 to 8,000 traffic crashes each day. The resulting impact on employers is significant. These crashes pose a major risk to employers of all sizes, which ultimately means a risk to the company's bottom line.

In addition, the Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS) released the results of a national telephone survey that showed distracted driving has become an increasingly dangerous trend.

Nearly all drivers—94%—reported having engaged in activities that are potentially distracting while driving. In addition, 39% of respondents reported engaging in distracted driving activities primarily while driving for work. These survey results highlight the need for increased involvement from employers who often bear the costs when an employee is involved in a traffic crash.

More Research

Research also indicates that in more than 50% of crashes, driver inattention was a contributing cause. In fact, when a crash occurs, the driver takes no evasive action 80% of the time and in about 40% of those situations, the incident could have been avoided if the driver had acted properly. These statistics may indicate that in many instances, the driver was distracted and failed to recognize the upcoming hazard.

Risk Engineering Services

Type of Distractions

There are essentially two kinds of driver distractions. **Cognitive distraction** takes the driver's mind off the driving task. Driver instructors estimate that a driver makes 200 decisions for every mile of driving. If a driver is mentally solving business and/or family problems while driving, then he is adding significantly to his cognitive workload.

The second type of distraction is due to **physical manipulation of things** that takes a driver's eyes off the road and/or his hands off the wheel. If a driver takes his eyes off the road for no more than three to four seconds, at 55 miles per hour, his vehicle will have traveled the length of a football field.

Research shows that cognitive forms of distraction can be more dangerous than physically manipulating objects. Other factors that may increase the impact of distractions include fatigue and traffic conditions.

Examples of Distractions

- Driving unfamiliar vehicles
- Attending to passengers
- Eating and drinking
- Cell phone use
- Texting while driving
- Personal grooming
- Reading a map
- Reading a newspaper or book
- Carrying unsecured cargo or objects
- Daydreaming
- Taking notes
- Searching for lost items

Education Is Available

Education and training programs sponsored by groups such as NETS, the National Safety Council, and local organizations can provide training that enable employees to identify potential distractions while driving and develop strategies to manage and minimize distractions.

The programs can include distracted driving awareness kits, video clips, and other useful tools and information. The programs can help keep employees focused on the task at hand: driving. They help reinforce that drive time is not downtime!

Tips for Drivers

Below are some good tips to pass along to drivers to help them avoid distraction and stay safe on the road:

- If you are driving an unfamiliar vehicle, spend a few minutes to acquaint yourself with all of the controls, adjust the seat and mirrors and pre-set the climate control and entertainment options.
- Never text or send emails while driving. Texting while driving can be more dangerous than driving while impaired.
- Keep your focus on driving and don't let passengers become a distraction.
- Take a hint from the food industry and take a break. Eating and drinking while driving can be hazardous.
- Postpone intense, emotional or complicated cell phone calls until the car is stopped. If you need to use your cell phone while driving, make sure that you are using a hands-free phone system. Also, try to keep your conversations brief.

- Get up in plenty of time to complete all grooming before leaving your home.
- If you're lost, stop where it is safe and legal to do so and ask for directions. The time to be reading a map is not when you're driving.
- If you're tempted to read a newspaper, book, or work report while driving, put them in the trunk of the car so you can't reach them.
- Maintain a safe following distance at all times. Use the two-second rule during normal driving conditions and the four-second rule during hazardous or challenging driving conditions.
- Secure all loose objects in your car so they don't become a distraction.

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