



DISTRACTION AND CELL PHONE USE

- The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates that 3,331 people were killed in crashes involving distracted drivers in 2011, and an estimated 387,000 more were injured. Ten percent of fatal crashes and 17 percent of injury crashes were reported as distraction-affected crashes.
 - Eleven percent of all drivers 15-19 years old involved in fatal crashes were reported as “distracted” at the time of the crash; this age group has the largest proportion of drivers who were distracted.¹
- NHTSA observational research found an average of five percent of drivers were holding cell phones to their ears while driving, translating to 660,000 vehicles driven by people holding hand-held cell phones at any given moment in 2011. The percent of drivers observed texting or visibly manipulating their hand-held cellphone increased significantly from .9 percent in 2010 to 1.3 percent in 2011.
 - Females and younger drivers ages 16-24 were more likely than their counterparts to be driving holding a phone to their ear, as were drivers with no passengers compared to drivers carrying at least one passenger.²
- In 2012, more than two in three drivers (68.9 percent) reported talking on their cell phone, (hand-held or hands-free) at least once in the past 30 days, with over half (57.4 percent) of those drivers using a hand-held phone rather than hands-free device.
 - More than one in four (26.6 percent) drivers admitted to typing or sending a text message or email, and more than one in three (34.6 percent) reported reading a text message or email while driving at least once in the past month.³

IMPLICATIONS FOR TRAFFIC SAFETY

- Driving while using a cell phone reduces brain activity associated with driving (e.g., spatial processing that helps drivers remember and make sense of the objects they observe on the street) by 37 percent.⁴
- Drivers text messaging behind the wheel are eight times as likely to be in a crash or near crash as drivers who are not texting.⁵
- Phone conversations of any type increase reaction times and increase variations in speed, lane deviations, and steering wheel control.⁶
- When conversing on mobile devices, either hand-held or hands-free, drivers increase their risk of a crash two to four times.^{7,8,11}
- Distractions beyond cell phones are growing at a rapid pace. Automotive infotainment systems are predicted to grow from 9 million vehicles on the road in 2013 to at least 62 million in 2018, and key features of these technologies will include “connected navigation, multimedia streaming, social media, and in-car Wi-Fi hotspots.”⁹
- Drivers who use cell phones behind the wheel with greater frequency are also more likely to engage in a variety of additional risky behaviors, such as red light running, speeding, and texting.¹⁰

PUBLIC OPINION

- The majority of Americans (88.5 percent) feel that a driver talking on a cell phone represents a somewhat or a serious threat to their personal safety.¹⁰
 - That proportion increases to 95.7 and 95.1 percent, respectively, with regards to drivers text messaging or emailing behind the wheel, and drivers checking or updating social media.



- Nine in ten (90.3 percent) people believe that distracted drivers are a somewhat or much bigger problem today compared to three years ago.¹⁰
- Most drivers (71.3 percent) believe that when talking on a cell phone while driving, it is safer to use a hands-free device than a hand-held device.³
- One out of two drivers who reported using a hands-free, speech-based in-vehicle system said they believed use of the technology was “not distracting at all.”³

Sources:

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