

Tips for being a focused driver

Distracted driving is on the rise. Consider these facts. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), in 2008, nearly 6,000 people died because of a distracted driver and more than a half-million were injured.

According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, drivers who use hand-held devices are four times as likely to get into crashes serious enough to injure themselves.

Traffic accident deaths attributed to distracted driving rose from 10% in 2005 to 16% in 2009.

What is distracted driving? Distracted driving is any non-driving activity a person engages in while operating a motor vehicle. The radio, your cell phone, food, even your friends - these can all be distractions while you're driving.

Teens are at most risk. Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for teens in the United States. The younger, inexperienced drivers under 20 years

old have the highest proportion of distraction-related fatal crashes.

According to the CTIA, the Wireless Association, an estimated 110 billion text messages were sent each month in 2008.

Texting while driving is one of the most dangerous of all distracted driving activities, because it takes your hands off the wheel and eyes and mind off the road.

Not surprisingly, drivers under the age of 20 text more than any other age group and the numbers are only increasing.



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Is it safe to use hands-free cell phone technology while driving? The available research indicates that whether it is a hands-free or hand-held device, the cognitive distraction is significant enough to degrade a driver's performance. The driver is more likely to miss key visual and audio cues needed to avoid a crash.

Is talking on a cell phone any worse than having a conversation with someone in the car? Some research findings show both activities to be equally risky, while others show cell phone use to be more risky. A significant difference between the two is the fact that a passenger can monitor the driving situation along with the driver and pause for, or alert the driver to, potential hazards, whereas a person on the other end of the phone line is unaware of the roadway situation.

How do states deal with this problem? Responses vary by state. Some states have laws banning certain types of distractions. Indiana does not.

What is the National Highway Traffic Safety Association doing to try to combat this problem?

NHTSA is conducting research projects on driver cell phone use and will continue to monitor the research of others on this subject. As more is learned and as wireless technologies evolve and expand, NHTSA will make its findings public.

Are there any federal laws regarding distractions in cars? No. Those laws fall under the jurisdiction of individual states.

What can you do? Be a good example! Show good driving behaviors. It's better to stay alive than to stay connected. Don't text and drive. Let's strive to make our roads safer. Put the cell phone down when you're driving or walking to and from convention. Keep your focus on arriving safely.

For more information, visit www.distraction.gov.