

Learn the Facts About Distracted Driving

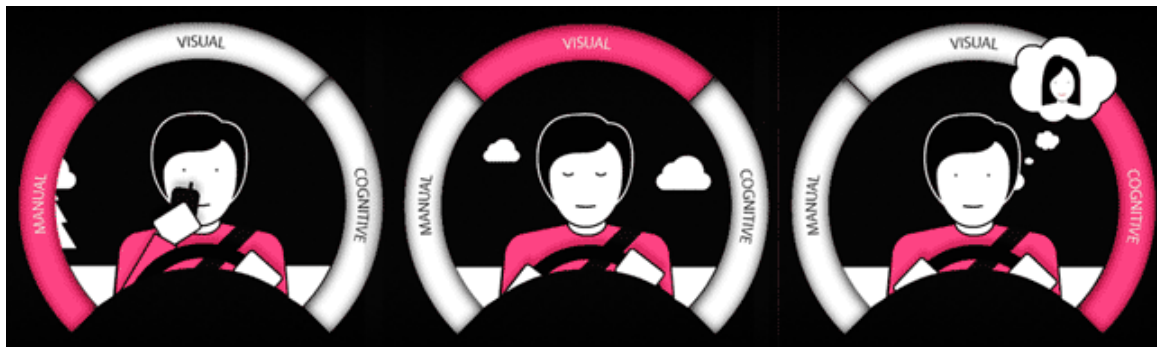
How serious are the dangers? Deadly serious. Look at the facts:

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), a division of the U.S. Transportation Department, distracted driving is “any activity that could divert a person’s attention away from the primary task of driving.” It’s not just texting or making calls on a cell phone; any activity that diverts a driver’s attention puts that driver, and her passengers, and everyone else sharing the road at serious risk.

A partial list of what counts as a distraction would include things such as using a cell phone or smart phone, including texting, eating and drinking, smoking, attending to or disciplining child passengers, grooming, reading, including maps, using a navigation system, watching a video, adjusting a radio, CD player, or MP3 player or adjusting temperature controls.

The three types of distraction

Traffic safety experts classify distractions into three main types: Manual, visual and cognitive.



- Manual distractions are those where you move your hands away from the task of controlling the vehicle. Reaching for a soda in the drink carrier is an example of a manual distraction.
- Visual distractions are those where you focus your eyes away from the road. You drop your soda, and when it spills all over the floor of the car, you look down at your ruined shoes and stained slacks: that’s a visual distraction.
- A cognitive distraction is when you’re mind wanders away from the task of driving. You start to consider whether you can afford to replace the clothing you just ruined, and what stores have bargains this week, and you’re no longer paying attention to the essential job of driving. Bingo: cognitive distraction.

This is why texting has such a bad reputation: it always involves *all three types* of distraction, all at once.

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Researcher [David Strayer of the University of Utah](#) found that talking on a cell phone quadruples your risk of an accident, about the same as if you were driving drunk. That risk doubles again, to eight times normal, if you are texting.

A 2009 study sponsored by the [Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration](#) examined commercial vehicle crashes and concluded that text messaging creates a crash risk 23 times greater than driving without distraction.

Sending or receiving a text message distracts a driver for about five seconds; at highway speeds, that represents a distance of about 300 feet in which the car is essentially out of human control, driving itself.

According to the [NHTSA](#), over 5,000 people were killed and over 440,000 injured in motor vehicle accidents connected to distracted driving. That represents 16 percent of all fatal crashes and 20 percent of all accidents that caused injuries. The [National Safety Council](#) disputes these findings, and says that at least 28 percent of vehicle crashes are caused by *texting and cell phone use alone*—never mind other distractions.

Young drivers are at the greatest risk for distracted driving incidents. Some researchers speculate that this is because inexperienced drivers are the most likely to overestimate their ability to multitask. The NHTSA says that in 2009, some 16 percent of teen drivers involved in a fatal crash were reported to have been distracted.

Are drivers taking this seriously enough?

No. Surveys find that adults recognize that other drivers are behaving irresponsibly, but they find excuses for their own risky driving behavior.

In a survey from the [AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety](#), over 90 percent of drivers recognized the danger from cell phone distractions and found it “unacceptable” that drivers text or send e-mail while driving. Nevertheless, 35 percent of these same people admitted to having read or sent a text message or e-mail while driving in the previous month. Similarly, two-thirds of the survey respondents admitted to talking on a cell phone, even though 88 percent found it a threat to safety.