

# Distracted Driving

A leading cause of vehicle crashes in the United States

Distraction is broadly considered to be any activity that takes hands off the wheel of the vehicle, draws eyes away from the road or simply takes the mind to another place.



## What distracts us

Implied in the definition is that distraction can be several things at the same time. For example, “rubbernecking” as you pass a crash not only takes your eyes away from the road, but also distracts your mind with questions like: “What happened?” “How badly were they hurt?” “Do I know them?”

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) produced a study in 2010 listing the top causes of distraction and a measure of the increased risk of each distraction (vs. normal driving.) Here are the results:

Distraction	Risk Multiple
Reaching for something	8.82
Insect in vehicle	6.37
Looking at something outside the vehicle	3.70
Reading	3.38
Applying makeup	3.13
Using phone (dialing/texting)	2.79
Inserting/retrieving CD (Adjusting radio/temperature)	2.25
Eating	1.57
Drinking from an open container	1.03
Interacting with passenger in adjacent seat	0.50

*For example, reaching for something is almost nine times riskier than normal driving.*

While some of these physical distractions, such as putting on makeup or reading, may demonstrate a more obvious lack of wisdom, too many drivers still use their phones to text or call while they drive.

Use of hands-free devices, according to the studies, is not significantly different from holding the phone, despite the legality of one vs. the other. While the effectiveness of voice-based texting apps needs further study, those apps that require manipulation of the phone or menus may not provide any benefit. The reason these options might not be better is because, though they may eliminate much of the physical distraction, they do not seem to address cognitive distraction. Recent studies indicate humans cannot successfully multi-task; something always suffers. When a person concentrates on a conversation instead of the road ahead, his or her driving suffers.

### What the numbers tell us

- The average person reads a text in about 4.6 seconds. At 55 mph, a car travels 80 feet every second. Reading a text while driving is like driving the length of a football field blindfolded.<sup>1</sup>
- At any given time during daylight hours in the U.S., upwards of 660,000 drivers are using their phone or texting.<sup>2</sup>
- In 2012, distracted driving accounted for nine deaths and over 1,000 injuries every day.<sup>2</sup>
- According to the CDC, 7 in 10 drivers admitted to making a call while driving, and 3 in 10 admitted to texting while driving in the 30 days leading up to the study.<sup>3</sup>



## Mitigating distraction

### Plan calls

Establish times during the day when the driver can pull off the road and be available for communications (whether text, email or telephone). Work out the frequency and times, based on expected needs and the job being done.

### Ignore the phone

Calls cannot always be scheduled. Establish a culture where allowing callers to leave messages to be returned at the earliest convenience (i.e., when it is safe to do so) is acceptable.

### Drive defensively

Defensive driving techniques provide more time to respond to changing driving conditions.

- Pre-set temperature and radio controls.
- Clear windows of frost, ice, snow or debris before driving.
- Increase following distance. (Zurich recommends at least four seconds in normal conditions in a sedan and longer in larger vehicles or adverse conditions.)
- Understand what is occurring ahead of the vehicle. (Zurich recommends scanning at least ten seconds ahead.)
- Drive for conditions. In inclement weather, slow down and allow for increased stopping distances and poor visibility.
- Deal with distractions in a safe location, while parked.

## Helpful Resources

1. <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/3416distracted-driving-flyer.pdf>
2. <http://www.distraction.gov/get-the-facts/facts-and-statistics.html>
3. [http://www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/distracted\\_driving/](http://www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/distracted_driving/)
4. [http://www.nhtsa.gov/staticfiles/nti/distracted\\_driving/pdf/811299.pdf](http://www.nhtsa.gov/staticfiles/nti/distracted_driving/pdf/811299.pdf)
5. <http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/driver-safety/distracted-driving>
6. [http://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/publications/road\\_traffic/distracted\\_driving\\_summary.pdf](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/publications/road_traffic/distracted_driving_summary.pdf)
7. <http://distracteddriving.caa.ca/education/>
8. <http://www.nhtsa.gov/Research/Human+Factors/Distraction>
9. <http://tti.tamu.edu/enhanced-project/voice-to-text-driver-distraction-study/>
10. <http://newsroom.aaa.com/2013/06/think-you-know-all-about-distracted-driving-think-again-says-aaa/>

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