

## Distracted Driving

Distracted driving has become an increasingly large problem on our nation's roadways as cellphones have become more common in our day-to-day lives. In 1995, cellphone subscriptions covered only 11 percent of the U.S. population; in 2010, that number grew to 93 percent!

This increase in cellphone subscriptions has led to a substantial increase in cellphone use while driving. According to the National Safety Council, 23 percent of all crashes annually involve cellphone use, resulting in 1.3 million crashes nationally. While a growing number of drivers are turning to hands-free devices, studies show hands-free devices provide no safety benefit. It's the conversation, not the device, that creates the danger. Distractions, along with alcohol and speeding, are now leading factors in fatal- and serious-injury crashes.

## Distractions

There are three main types of distractions that can occur while driving:

- Visual: taking your eyes off the road
- Manual: taking your hands off the wheel
- Cognitive: taking your mind off driving

While cellphone use is a leading contributor to distracted driving, any activity that has the potential to divert a person's attention away from the primary task of driving should be addressed. Drivers are faced with more distractions on the roads than ever before. All distractions endanger the safety of drivers, passengers, and bystanders. Common distractions while driving can include:

- Texting
- Using a cellphone or smartphone
- Eating and drinking
- Talking to passengers
- Grooming
- Reading, including maps
- Using a navigation system
- Adjusting a radio, CD player, or MP3 player

## Number One Distraction: Cellphones

According to the National Safety Council, researchers observing more than 1,700 drivers found that three out of every four drivers using a cellphone committed a traffic violation. Talking on a cellphone while driving makes you four times as likely to crash.

According to the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute (VTTI), your eyes are off the road an average of five seconds while texting. When traveling at 55 mph, that's enough time to cover the length of a football field blindfolded! Texting while driving increases your chances of a crash by up to 8 to 23 times.



## Steps for Employers to Consider

Whether your organization employs drivers who are behind the wheel full-time or only occasionally to carry out their work, you have a responsibility to safeguard your employees. This responsibility exists whether your employees drive a company vehicle or their own vehicle. When your employees are behind the wheel for work, their safety is your business.

Building a workplace culture of safety requires clear, explicit policies and sound practices. Some companies prohibit employees from using cellphones while driving on company time. Other companies adopt cellphone safety guidelines and focus on training and enforcement. Each company should determine whether the benefits of employee cellphone use outweigh the risk. Companies should consider establishing a policy restricting the use of cellphones while operating vehicles and ensure employees read and sign the written policy.

Employers should consider the following when developing policies to combat distracted driving:

**Completely banning cellphone use** while driving

**Requiring cellphones to be turned off** or placed on silent or vibrate before starting the car

Directing employees to **comply with all state and local laws** governing cellphone use

Requiring employees to **pull over and park in a legal and safe location** to take phone calls or send text messages

Instructing employees to **avoid or terminate phone calls** involving stressful or emotional conversations

Prohibiting cellphone use in **adverse weather or difficult traffic conditions**

**Prohibiting reading or writing** while operating a vehicle

**Planning calls** prior to traveling or while on rest breaks whenever possible

**Prohibiting texting while driving** — declare your vehicles “text-free zones”

**Establishing work procedures and rules** that do not make it necessary for workers to text while driving in order to carry out their duties

**Setting up clear procedures, times, and places** for drivers’ safe use of texting and other technologies for communicating with managers, customers, and others

**Incorporating safe communication practices** into worker orientation and training programs

**Eliminating financial and other incentive systems** that encourage workers to text while driving

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