

LOSS CONTROL

Information Bulletin

Distracted Driving Dangers

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reported that distracted drivers killed 5,870 in the U.S. in 2008. The NHTSA estimated that 20% of all highway crashes in the U.S. involved distracted drivers. Expressed another way, distracted drivers killed 16 people each day, and injured another 1,300 people.

Distracted driving is any activity that a driver engages in that diverts his attention away from his primary task of driving a vehicle safely. The three main categories of driver distractions are: (a) visual – talking your eye off the road, (b) cognitive – taking your mind off driving and (c) manual – taking your hands off the steering wheel.

In a joint study by NHTSA and Virginia Tech Transportation Institute, the top ten driver distractions are:

- (a) using a wireless communication device such as a cell phone
- (b) talking to and interacting with passengers
- (c) retrieving objects such as food, drinks and CD's
- (d) programming radio stations or tinkering with dashboard controls
- (e) personal hygiene activities such as using an electric razor or applying makeup
- (f) observing scenery or pointing out objects
- (g) lighting a cigarette or smoking
- (h) singing or talking to oneself
- (i) eating while driving
- (j) day dreaming

Additional driver distractions identified in other studies include:

- (a) rubber necking, especially at vehicle accident scenes
- (b) using a G.P.S. or other personal navigation system
- (c) reading maps and other materials
- (d) hunting for signs and/or addresses
- (e) driving while fatigued or sleepy

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Distracted drivers that are involved in accidents could be punished for their actions. Some states punish distracted drivers through general laws that define distracted driving as doing something while operating a motor vehicle which: (1) is unnecessary to operating the vehicle and (2) impairs the driver's ability to drive safely. Drivers could be subject to lawsuits for the accidents they cause. Many times the issue of negligence becomes the deciding factor in a lawsuit. If evidence points to a distracted driver as the cause of an accident, then a jury may look with favor upon awarding significant monetary damages.

Today thirty states have imposed some restrictions on specific activities such as texting while operating a motor vehicle. In October 2010, The Federal Motor Carriers Safety Administration instituted a "no texting ban" on all CDL licensed drivers in the United States. The penalty for a conviction could be a fine of \$2,750 for the driver and an \$11,000 fine for the carrier (employer) and possible driver disqualification.

What can be done to reduce and eliminate distracted driver accidents? Below are some common sense suggestions that all drivers should adhere.

- (a) turn off the cell phone or switch to a silent mode when operating a vehicle
- (b) do not make calls or answer the phone while driving
- (c) do not read text messages or send text messages when driving
- (d) be sure you are awake and alert enough to drive
- (e) move the mirrors to the correct positions before starting to drive
- (f) keep noise to a minimum inside the vehicle while driving
- (g) place all objects in a secure location before starting to drive
- (h) stop and review maps or driving directions when you approach an unfamiliar location
- (i) drive slow when looking for street addresses and stay alert for other vehicles
- (j) keep your eyes and mind focused on the highway and your hands securely on the steering wheel

SAFETY IS NO ACCIDENT

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