



FACT SHEET

Distracted Driving

In 2013, there were 3,154 people killed and 424,000 injured in crashes involving a distracted driver.¹ Crashes in which at least one driver was identified as being distracted imposed an economic cost of \$39.7 billion dollars in 2010.² It is clear from an increasing body of safety research, studies and data that the use of electronic devices for telecommunications (such as mobile phones and text messaging), telematics and entertainment can readily distract drivers from the driving task.

Currently, forty-one states (AL, AK, AR, CA, CO, CT, DE, GA, HI, ID, IL, IN, KS, KY, LA, ME, MD, MA, MI, MN, MS, NV, NH, NJ, NM, NY, NC, ND, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC, TN, UT, VT, VA, WA, WV, WI, and WY) and the District of Columbia have a primary law banning text messaging for all drivers.³ In order to get people to pay attention while operating a vehicle and to adopt safer behaviors, education must be combined with strong laws and appropriate enforcement. This is the tried and true method to change behavior in order to improve safety.

Distracted Driving Facts

- Research has shown that because of the degree of cognitive distraction these devices cause, the behavior of drivers using mobile phones (whether hand-held or hands-free) is equivalent to the behavior of drivers at the threshold of the legal limit for alcohol (0.08 blood alcohol concentration).⁴
- Crash risk increases dramatically – as much as four times higher – when a driver is using a mobile phone, with no significant safety difference between hand-held and hands-free phones observed in many studies.⁵

¹ Traffic Safety Facts Research Note: Distracted Driving 2013, NHTSA, April 2015, DOT HS 812 132, available at <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/812132.pdf>

² The Economic and Societal Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2010 (Revised), NHTSA, May 2015 (Revised), DOT HS 812 013, available at <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/812013.pdf>

³ Distracted Driving: State Laws, Insurance Institute for Highway and Auto Safety (IIHS) website, last accessed on Jun. 26, 2014, at <http://www.iihs.org/iihs/topics/laws/cellphonelaws?topicName=distracted-driving>

⁴ Fatal Distraction? A Comparison of the Cell-Phone Driver and the Drunk Driver, Strayer, D.L., Drews, F.A., Crouch, D.J., University of Utah, Department of Psychology, available at <http://www.psych.utah.edu/AppliedCognitionLab/DrivingAssessment2003.pdf>

⁵ McEvoy, S.P.; Stevenson, M.R.; McCartt A.T.; Woodward, M.; Haworth, C; Palamara, P.; and Cercarelli, R. 2005. Role of mobile phones in motor vehicle crashes resulting in hospital attendance: a case-crossover study. *British Medical Journal* 331(7514):428; available at <http://www.bmj.com/content/331/7514/428> ; and Redelmeier, D.A. and Tibshirani, R.J. 1997. Association between cellular-telephone call and motor vehicle collisions. *The New England Journal of Medicine* 336:453-58, available at http://www.nsc.org/news_resources/Resources/Documents/Association%20between%20cellular%20telephone%20calls%20and%20motor%20vehicle%20collisions.pdf

- A 2009 study by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute found that text messaging increased the risk of a safety-critical driving event by 23.2 times.⁶
- Ten percent of fatal crashes, eighteen percent of injury crashes, and sixteen percent of all motor vehicle traffic crashes in 2013 were reported as distraction-affected crashes.⁷
- In 2013 there were 1.91 trillion text messages sent or received in the U.S.⁸
- Ten percent of all drivers 15-19 years old involved in a fatal crash were reported as distracted at the time of the crash. This age group has the largest proportion of drivers involved in fatal crashes who were distracted.⁹
- Sending or receiving a text message causes the driver's eyes to be off the road for an average of 4.6 seconds. When driving 55 miles per hour, this is the equivalent of driving the entire length of a football field blind.¹⁰
- According to the NHTSA, the percentage of drivers holding cell phones to their ears while driving was just below 5 percent in 2013. This rate translates into 620,000 vehicles driven by people using hand-held cell phones at a typical daylight moment in 2013.¹¹
- According to the NHTSA, the percentage of drivers visibly manipulating hand-held devices while driving has increased for the fourth year in a row with a total increase of 183% between 2009 and 2012.¹²

⁶ What is Distracted Driving? Key Facts and Statistics, DOT NHTSA, available at <http://www.distraction.gov/content/get-the-facts/facts-and-statistics.html>, citing Olson, R.L., Hanowski, R.J., Hickman, J.S., Bocanegra, J.; "Driver Distraction in Commercial Vehicle Operations", VTTI, Sep. 2009, available at <http://www.distraction.gov/research/PDF-Files/Driver-Distraction-Commercial-Vehicle-Operations.pdf>

⁷ Traffic Safety Facts Research Note: Distracted Driving 2013, NHTSA, April 2015, DOT HS 812 132, available at <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/812132.pdf>

⁸ Annual Wireless Industry Survey, CTIA: The Wireless Association, available at <http://www.ctia.org/your-wireless-life/how-wireless-works/annual-wireless-industry-survey>.

⁹ [Teen](#) Distracted Driver Data, Teens and Distracted Driving, 2013, April 2015, DOT HS 812 131, available at <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/812131.pdf>

¹⁰ Distraction.gov: Frequently Asked Questions, DOT NHTSA, available at <http://www.distraction.gov/content/get-the-facts/faq.html>

¹¹ Traffic Safety Facts Research Note: Driver Electronic Device Use in 2013, NHTSA, April 2015, DOT HS 812 114, available at <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/812114.pdf>

¹² Traffic Safety Facts Research Note: Driver Electronic Device Use in 2013, NHTSA, April 2015, DOT HS 812 114, available at <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/812114.pdf>