



## Distracted Driving

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In 2017, 3,166 people were killed in crashes involving a distracted driver, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). This accounts for 8.5 percent of fatalities on U.S. roads in 2017.<sup>i</sup> In 2015, the most recent year for which injury data is available, there were 391,000 people injured in crashes involving a distracted driver.<sup>ii</sup> Moreover, crashes in which at least one driver was identified as being distracted imposed an economic cost of \$40 billion dollars in 2010.<sup>iii</sup>

However, issues with underreporting crashes involving cell phones remain because of differences in police crash report coding, database limitations, and other challenges. 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, 43 states (AL, AK, AR, CA, CO, CT, DE, GA, HI, ID, IL, IN, IA, KS, KY, LA, ME, MD, MA, MI, MN, MS, NV, NH, NJ, NM, NY, NC, ND, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC, TN, TX, UT, VT, VA, WA, WV, WI, and WY) and the District of Columbia have a primary enforcement law banning text messaging for all drivers.<sup>iv</sup> As technology on mobile devices has developed to include other electronic communications and uses such as video chatting, streaming, posting to social media and “apps,” states have begun enhancing their texting ban laws by prohibiting these and other distracting electronic communications and uses while driving. Laws that prohibit hands free use must also ensure that distracting uses that divert a driver’s attention to a screen, such as video streaming, recording and broadcasting, are also prohibited. 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).<sup>v</sup>
- 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.<sup>vi</sup>
- A 2009 study by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute found that text messaging increased the risk of a safety-critical driving event (i.e., crashes, near-crashes, crash-relevant conflicts, and unintentional lane deviations) by 23.2 times.<sup>vii</sup>
- Approximately nine percent of 15-19 year old drivers involved in a fatal crash were reported as distracted at the time of the crash.<sup>viii</sup> This age group has the largest proportion of drivers involved in fatal crashes who were distracted.<sup>ix</sup>
- In 2017 there were 1.77 trillion text and multimedia messages sent or received in the U.S.<sup>x</sup>
- 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.<sup>xi</sup>

- The percentage of drivers holding cell phones to their ears while driving was just over three percent in 2016 according to NHTSA. This rate translates into almost 481,000 vehicles driven by people using hand-held cell phones at a typical daylight moment in 2015.<sup>xii</sup>
- According to the NHTSA, the percentage of drivers visibly manipulating hand-held devices while driving increased by 250 percent between 2009 and 2016.<sup>xiii</sup>
- A 2016 survey conducted by State Farm found that:
  - Accessing the internet, reading and updating social media networks on a cell phone while driving more than doubled from 2009 to 2016.
  - Additionally about 10% of those surveyed in 2016 were also playing games on a cell phone while driving.<sup>xiv</sup>
- NHTSA’s most recent survey found when compared to prior surveys that twice as many people reported cell phone use – whether talking or texting – when they were involved in a crash or near crash. The survey also indicated a high level of support for laws banning the behavior, 92% of respondents supported state laws banning texting or emailing while driving.<sup>xv</sup>
- In addition to all-driver texting ban and graduated driver license (GDL) cell phone ban laws, universal hand held ban laws may help to support enforcement of distracted driving laws whether actual or perceived.<sup>xvi</sup>

<sup>i</sup> 2017 Fatal Motor Vehicle Crashes: Overview, October 2018, NHTSA, DOT HS 812 603, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812603>

<sup>ii</sup> Distracted Driving 2015, March 2017, NHTSA, DOT HS 812 381, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812381>

<sup>iii</sup> 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>

<sup>iv</sup> Distracted Driving: Cellphones and Texting, January 2019, Insurance Institute for Highway and Auto Safety (IIHS) website, last accessed on January 3, 2019, at <https://www.iihs.org/iihs/topics/laws/cellphonelaws>

<sup>v</sup> 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://drivingassessment.uiowa.edu/DA2003/pdf/5\\_Strayerformat.pdf](http://drivingassessment.uiowa.edu/DA2003/pdf/5_Strayerformat.pdf)

<sup>vi</sup> 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](http://www.nsc.org/news_resources/Resources/Documents/Association%20between%20cellular%20telephone%20calls%20and%20motor%20vehicle%20collisions.pdf)

<sup>vii</sup> 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>

<sup>viii</sup> Teens and Distracted Driving 2015, NHTSA, October 2016, DOT HS 812 335. Available at: <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812335>.

<sup>ix</sup> Distracted Driving Overview, NHTSA available at: <https://www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/distracted-driving>.

<sup>x</sup> The State of Wireless 2018, CTIA: The Wireless Association, available at [https://api.ctia.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/CTIA\\_State-of-Wireless-2018\\_0710.pdf](https://api.ctia.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/CTIA_State-of-Wireless-2018_0710.pdf)

<sup>xi</sup> Blueprint for Ending Distracted Driving, NHTSA, June 2012, DOT HS 811 629, available at <ftp://nhtsa.gov/CPSCreative/blueprint/CA/brochure/8747-811629-060612-v4-FPO.pdf>

<sup>xii</sup> Traffic Safety Facts Research Note: Driver Electronic Device Use in 2016, June 2017, NHTSA, DOT HS 812 426, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812426>

<sup>xiii</sup> Id.

<sup>xiv</sup> Texting While Driving Includes Growing Mobile Web Use, <https://www.statefarm.com/simple-insights/auto-and-vehicles/distracted-driving-includes-growing-mobile-web-use>

<sup>xv</sup> Schroeder, P., Wilbur, M., & Peña, R. (2018, March). National survey on distracted driving attitudes and behaviors – 2015 (Report No. DOT HS 812 461). Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Available at: [https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.dot.gov/files/documents/13123-2015\\_natl\\_survey\\_distracted\\_driving\\_031418\\_v5\\_tag.pdf](https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.dot.gov/files/documents/13123-2015_natl_survey_distracted_driving_031418_v5_tag.pdf)

<sup>xvi</sup> Cellphone Legislation and Self-Reported Behaviors Among Subgroups of Adolescent U.S. Drivers, Rudisill, Toni M. et al. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Volume 62, Issue 5, 618 – 625.