ADVOCATES FOR HIGHWAY & AUTO SAFETY

Distracted Driving

In 2019, 3,142 people were killed in crashes involving a distracted driver according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), a nearly ten percent increase from 2018. This accounts for 8.7 percent of fatalities on U.S. roads in 2019.[i] In 2019, there were an estimated 424,000 people injured in distraction-affected crashes, the most recent year for which data is available.[ii] Moreover, crashes in which at least one driver was identified as being distracted imposed an economic cost of $40 billion in 2010.[iii] Adjusted for inflation only, that amounts to $48 billion in 2021 dollars.[iv] In 2018 distracted driving crashes cost employers nearly $19 billion.[v]

The true impact of distracted driving remains unclear due to issues with the underreporting of crashes involving distraction, including differences in police crash report coding and database limitations.[vi] 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. In recognition of this safety hazard, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) includes "eliminate distractions" on its Most Wanted List of Transportation Safety Improvements.[vii]

Currently, 46 states (AL, AK, AR, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DE, FL, 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, SD, 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.[viii] 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 handheld 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. A report on distracted driving laws by the Transportation Research Board (TRB) recommends that state laws should "be in effect at all times when the vehicle is traveling on public roads, this includes at stop lights and when temporarily slowed or stopped in traffic" and prohibit the use of "an electronic device to stream, record, or broadcast video. This includes when the device is used hands-free (mounted, affixed, or resting somewhere in the vehicle)."[ix] To get people to pay attention while operating a vehicle and to adopt safer behaviors, education must be combined with strong laws and appropriate and equitable enforcement.

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 percent blood alcohol concentration).[x]
- 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.[xi]
- 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.[xii]
- Nine percent of 15-19 year old drivers 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.[xiii]
- In 2019 over two trillion text and multimedia messages were sent or received in the U.S.[xiv]
- 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.[xv]

- The percentage of drivers holding cell phones to their ears while driving was just over three percent in 2018 according to NHTSA. This rate translates into just over 470,000 passenger vehicles driven by people using hand-held cell phones at a typical daylight moment in 2018.[xvi]
- According to NHTSA, the percentage of drivers visibly manipulating hand-held devices while driving increased by 250 percent between 2009 and 2018.[xvii]
- 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.
  - About 10 percent of those surveyed in 2016 were also playing games on a cell phone while driving.[xviii]
- 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 percent of respondents supported state laws banning texting or emailing while driving.[xix]
- 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.[xx]

Safety technologies can prevent crashes, save lives, reduce injuries and contain costs.

Proven and available advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS) have the capability to prevent and mitigate crashes caused by numerous behavioral issues including distraction, impairment, fatigue, speeding, and reckless driving.

- The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has included increasing implementation of collision avoidance technologies in its *Most Wanted List of Transportation Safety Improvements* since 2016.[xxi]
- Research by IIHS shows dramatic reductions in crashes with ADAS-equipped passenger vehicles.[xxii] Specifically:
  - Automatic Emergency Braking (AEB) can decrease front-to-rear crashes with injuries by 56 percent;
  - Lane Departure Warning (LDW) can reduce single-vehicle, sideswipe and head-on injury crashes by over 20 percent;
  - Blind Spot Detection (BSD) can diminish injury crashes from lane change by nearly 25 percent;
  - Rear AEB can reduce backing crashes by 78 percent when combined with rearview camera and parking sensors; and,
  - Rear cross-traffic alert can reduce backing crashes by 22 percent.
- In 2017, IIHS reported on the on-road effectiveness of forward collision warning (FCW) and AEB systems concluding that "[a]lmost 1 million U.S. police reported crashes in 2014 and more than 400,000 injuries in such crashes could have been prevented if all vehicles were equipped with FCW and AEB that perform similarly as systems did for study vehicles."[xxiii]
- The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety has identified the potential benefits of FCW/AEB, noting that "there were an estimated 1,994,000 crashes, 884,000 injuries, and 4,738 deaths that could have been potentially prevented or mitigated by FCW or AEB systems in 2016."[xxiv]
- The European New Car Assessment Program (NCAP) has started evaluating driver monitoring systems which can help "mitigate the very significant problems of driver distraction and impairment through alcohol, fatigue, etc."[xxv] in its rating program.

These essential safety systems must be standard equipment in all new vehicles (cars, large trucks and buses), subject to minimum performance requirements.

Effective crash avoidance safety technologies with minimum performance requirements should be standard, and not optional, equipment in all new vehicles. This action will achieve safety equity by both ensuring that the technology responds to and benefits all road users and that all consumers buying new vehicles are not upcharged for the technology. Doing so will also reduce the base cost of technology due to economies of scale.

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