Distracted Driving

Safety Tips to Reduce Distractions on the Road

Have you ever texted, spoken on the phone, changed radio stations, or even turned around to talk to passengers while driving? If so, you may be exposing yourself, your passengers, and anybody else on the road to harm. Driver distractions such as these accounted for 10 percent of all fatal crashes, 18 percent of injury crashes and 16 percent of all motor vehicle crashes in 2012, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

And of these hazards, cellphones and text messaging were the most common cause of accidents. However, other common habits, such as using a vehicle navigation system, eating and drinking, reading a map, grooming yourself, or even having a phone conversation using a hands-free device can be hazardous, too.

Employers May Be Held Liable

Not only is distracted driving dangerous for individuals, but there is a growing concern among business owners and managers that they may be held liable for accidents caused by their employees while driving and conducting work-related conversations on cellphones. Under the doctrine of ?vicarious responsibility,? employers may be held legally accountable for the negligent acts of employees committed in the course of employment. Employers may also be found negligent if they fail to put in place a policy for the safe use of cellphones.

Tips for Safer Travel

Keep these safety tips in mind when driving:

- **Pull Off the Road ?** Don?t drive while calling or texting; pull off the road to a safe location.
- **Use Voice-activated Dialing ?** If you *must* dial from the road, program frequently called numbers and your local emergency number into your phone and use voice-activated dialing.
- **Never Dial While Driving ?** If you *must* dial manually, do so only when stopped or have a passenger dial for you.
- **Take a Message ?** Let your voice mail pick up your calls while you?re driving. It's easy?and much safer?to retrieve your messages later on.
- **Know When to Stop Talking ?** If you *must* make or receive a call while driving, keep conversations on brief so you can concentrate on your driving. If a long discussion is required or if the topic is stressful or emotional, end the conversation and continue it once you are off the road.
- **Don?t Take Notes While Driving ?** If you need to write something down, use an audio recorder or pull off the road.
- **Know Where You?re Going ?** Study the route before you leave or have a passenger read the map. And if you?re using a navigation system, program in your destination before you start driving and use the audio setting to avoid having to look at the screen for directions.
- **Don?t Eat or Drink While Driving ?** Eating takes both your hand off the wheel and your eyes off the road, so don?t do it. Furthermore, spills can easily cause an accident. If you have to stop short, you could also be severely burned.
- **Groom Yourself At Home ?** Shaving, putting on makeup, combing your hair or other forms of preening are distractions and should be done at home, not while driving.

While everyone should follow these rules, it is particularly important to review them carefully with teen drivers. Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death among 15- to 20-year olds [1], and in 2012, 10 percent of all drivers in that age group involved in fatal crashes were distracted at the time of the crash, according to NHTSA. Talk to your teen about safe driving habits and, most importantly, model good behavior on the road. And for more information on distracted driving, see our Distracted Driving backgrounder [2].

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