

CHOICE!

IT'S YOURS.

Distracted Driving—Thrill or Threat?

We are all thrill seekers - some of us more extreme than others.

In an attempt to establish themselves, adolescents turn to experimentation. Some turn to alcohol; others turn to drugs. However, many teens engage in distracted driving without even considering it to be risky behavior. After all, texting has become second nature, so it is hard to consider it as destructive as drug or alcohol abuse.

Traffic collisions claim 34,000 lives each year in the US—

and eighty percent of these crashes result from distracted driving. More alarmingly, over 400,000 people are injured, sometimes irreversibly, due to similar reasons. The nation has already recognized distracted driving to be a major safety concern, and so, multiple states have passed distracted driving laws. In fact, forty-one states, including the District of Columbia,

ban text messaging while driving. Likewise, twelve states, including D.C., ban all hand-held cellular use. Despite some of the stringent laws in place, 11% of teens in fatal crashes were distracted at the time. After all, most violators are not caught, thus limiting the effectiveness of the laws in reducing tragedy. More aggressive action needs to be taken to reverse the cultural acceptance of distracted driving.

It is within our power to reverse this epidemic.

So, put that cell phone down,
fix the hair later,
and save a few lives.

Did you know?

Drivers who text are 23 times more likely to be involved in an accident.

Talking to passengers, reading (maps included!), adjusting the radio, reaching for an object, and commuting while sleep deprived are all distracted driving!

-Virginia Tech Transportation Institute

Making the Choice

To be in control. That is the feeling that young adults yearn to experience. From the stresses of school work to the physical turmoil of growing into their own skin, teenagers are in a constant struggle of discovering their own identities and independence. This craving to become a self-reliant person is the fuel that pushes teens to become licensed drivers, as, for the first time, they will be dependent only on themselves. But with this sudden autonomy should also come an icy shock of reality, as teenagers should recognize that they are, while driving, responsible for both themselves and their passengers. However, there are many who never realize this idea, quickly memorizing driving safety measures for the driver permit test, before just as quickly forgetting these regulations. With an “estimated 421,000 people injured in motor vehicle crashes involving a distracted driver in 2012,” a more thorough understanding of motor vehicle safety must be encouraged, not only by young adults eager to get their licenses, but by state governments eager to protect their people (“What”). By mandating driver safety programs in order to both obtain drivers’ licenses and renew licenses, regional authorities can encourage the deep understanding and practice of safe driving techniques and prevent ignorant drivers from operating a vehicle.

Throughout almost all facets of the media, the general belief of distracted driving is propagated as socially acceptable or even respectable. From movies that show texting while driving to fast food drive-through that unintentionally advertise eating while driving, many aspects of American culture condone distracted driving. For instance, the movie *The Fast and the Furious* centers its plot around high-speed car chases, with the drivers simultaneously focusing on numerous other actions. This film and others like it aggrandize the idea of multitasking while driving, as well as reckless driving. And while these actions may increase box office earnings, they do nothing to advocate driver safety, instead delivering the message that irresponsibility behind the wheel is attractive. This epidemic of poor driving techniques, however, can be combated with the implementation of obligatory driver safety programs. By mandating drivers of all ages to participate in a driver safety program upon obtaining or renewing a driver’s license, safe driving practices can be ingrained into all automobile operators’ minds. The taking of this course would be incentivized by the prize of being able to drive, thus endorsing the overall goal of eradicating distracted driving. A similar driver safety program has already been established in Virginia, North Carolina, and Vermont, but is directed towards a slightly

different goal. The program, called Safe Routes to School, addresses the issue that “speeding and distracted driving are two common safety risks for children traveling to school,” and “uses a variety of activities to decrease dangerous driving behavior, including...enforcing speed and distracted driving laws and conducting public information campaigns” (“Safe”). The successful implementation of Safe Routes to School demonstrates that a similar course of action, focusing more on the teaching of proper driving methods and the eliminating of reckless and distracted driving, can be just as beneficial to American communities.

The creation of a state-mandated driver safety course designed to teach proper driving techniques will benefit communities by keeping irresponsible drivers, who are unwilling to learn proper vehicle handling, off the roads. Because the required program would be coupled with both the driver’s license test and the license renewal process, an individual would have to successfully complete the course before obtaining and renewing his license. This prerequisite to being able to drive a car would ensure that everyone on the road is fully aware of driver safety and the dangers associated with risky or distracted driving. While opponents to the idea of a compulsory vehicle safety course accompanying every license renewal may claim that the initial permit test and the Department of Motor Vehicles’ point system are enough to maintain road safety, both of these safeguards fall far short of preventing many appalling drivers from operating a car. And while the police force is effective to some degree, “in cities the size of Oklahoma City or Tulsa, that’s asking a lot. There are hundreds to thousands of road miles involved” (“Police”). By supporting the driver safety program, states would encourage the lifelong learning of safe motor vehicle operation through the constant exposure of society to safe driving practices.

There are countless programs that work to prevent driving while intoxicated. And yet, by driving without focus, a person is, essentially, intoxicated by distraction. As the flood of technological advances sweep through America and make many aspects of life easier and more efficient, these developments are also causing drivers to spend less energy concentrating on the road. Instead, many people, including teenagers, are thinly spreading their focus over a large array of tasks. This distraction thus leads to reckless driving practices that will, most likely, end in an accident. However, by requiring driver safety programs in order to both obtain drivers’ licenses and renew licenses, regional authorities can support the deep understanding and practice of safe driving techniques and keep ignorant drivers from operating a vehicle.

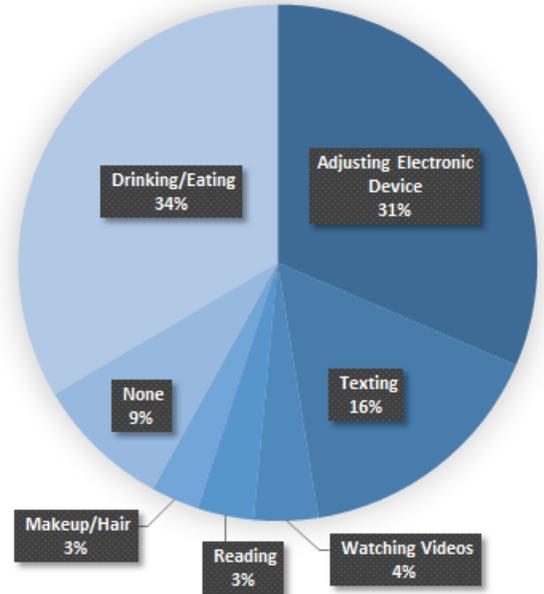
The Surveys-Proof of the Truth

Two studies were conducted to determine the scope of distracted driving among teenagers in suburban Pittsburgh: the first was an observational study where students were observed leaving the school parking lot, and the second was a survey designed to assess the scope of the problem.

The following actions are considered observable distracting driving actions for the first study: texting, drinking or eating, grooming, watching a video, reading, or adjusting an electronic device. Behaviors such as listening to music were not accounted for since such a variable would present a skew in the data. Some students may use earphones to listen to music, which would be readily visible, while others would use the radio--but whether the radio is turned on, it is hard to assess. The results of this first observational study is summarized in the circle graph. The top three distracted activities were, respectively, drinking/eating, adjusting an electronic device, and texting. All these activities take the driver's hands off the wheel, which is arguably the most dangerous action as it directly affects the steering.

The observational study limits the ability to truly assess the habits of teen drivers in the area. Therefore, a survey was given to a representative sample of 100 teen drivers. The following question was posed:

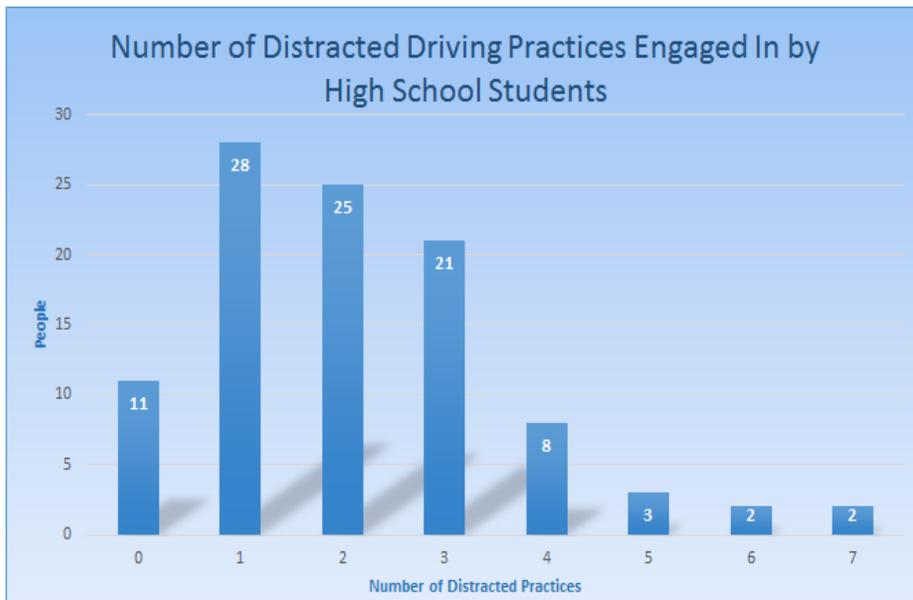
Observed Distracted Driving Behavior



~The national cellular usage that caused crashes was 23% as of 2010-significantly greater than the proportion of teens who use cellular devices for texting in suburban Pittsburgh.*

Which of the following activities do you engage in while driving? Check all that apply.

- Texting
- Drinking/Eating
- Applying makeup/Brushing hair
- Watching a video
- Reading
- Adjusting electronic device
- Commuting while sleep deprived
- None of the above



Even though the same variables are being assessed as in the observational study (with the addition of sleep deprivation - something which cannot be accurately assessed through observation), this survey is more comprehensive. Most teens engage in more than one distracted activity, and the survey allows an assessment of the full scope of the problem. The bar graph represents the number of distracted behaviors teens engage in while driving--2.14 distractions on average. A single diverted action for just a split second can be deadly, so it is even more alarming to see teens involved in multiple distractions.

The studies demonstrate that distracted driving is a major problem among teenagers in the suburbs of Pittsburgh. Hopefully, the results will force drivers to reevaluate their actions behind the wheel.

*<http://www.nsc.org/Pages/NSCestimates16millioncrashescausedbydriversusingcellphonesandtexting.aspx>

MAKE A

Calculate the trip in advance.

Hold off on answering messages.

Organize loose objects.

Input GPS information before starting the car.

Check the hunger pangs before the trip.

Enlist passengers' help while driving.

YOUR CHOICE

ELIMINATE DISTRACTED DRIVING

SAFE DRIVING = HAPPY LIVING

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