



It's an Important Text.

But more important than your life? Distracted driving qualifies as any activity that could divert a driver's attention from his or her primary task. It should seem obvious that taking eyes off the road for any amount of time is dangerous, but technology has allowed teens distractions that prove more engaging and more deadly than those of previous generations. Texting, surfing the web, dialing numbers – these commonplace activities have become the dominant cause of car accidents, yet the youth regard texting as necessary and normal if it takes place off the road or on. Researchers at the Texas Transportation Institute have observed that a driver's reaction time is doubled when distracted by reading or sending a text message. The study reveals how the texting impairment is underrepresented in commonly used statistics, and demonstrates how texting drivers are less able to react to sudden roadway hazards. Unfortunately, as previously stated, the generation most prone to distracted driving lacks an

"Kids think they're invincible. To them, texting is not distracting, they're so proficient at texting, that they don't feel it's distracted driving."

-Clay Sauer, father of victim Taylor Sauer, who crashed into a tanker truck going 15mph after posting "Driving and Facebooking not safe!"

essential understanding of just how dangerous distracted driving really is. Our youth perceives this "multitasking" as the norm, and those that do recognize the dangers of texting while driving fail to understand that distracted driving as a whole includes any activity which takes a driver's attention from the road (although the risk certainly heightens considerably when a cell phone is involved). Chatting animatedly, eating messy foods, or even studying a navigation device closely qualify as distracting the driver; failing to see the gravity of the situation, the driver allows him or herself to be distracted.

According to NHTSA, "In 2011, 3,331 people were killed in crashes involving distracted drivers," many of these victims being young people with bright futures like Taylor Sauer. That's 3,331 too many. But while the tragic symptoms of distracted driving are universally acknowledged, the cause itself needs to be pushed further in our court rooms, Congress, schools, social media, and other venues. The fatalities, the injuries, the families that have been damaged beyond repair – these are avoidable.

We need only take the first steps towards change.

"In the context of driving, you cannot become an expert at multitasking. A child running across the street, a traffic light changing really quickly, somebody pulling out in front of you – those unexpected events are one-offs. You can't be prepared for a kid who is going to run across the street a week from now. And the same thing goes for conversations of texting. Reacting to novel events while driving and carrying on a unique conversation places a demand on our limited attention.

-David Strayer, professor of psychology at the University of Utah



Five seconds.

That's how long Virginia Tech Institute estimates that your eyes are off the road and on your phone, compiling a text. But those five seconds allow enough time for tragedy to occur.



Such was the case for two-year-old Calli Ann Murray and her mother Ling as they walked home after an hour at the child's favorite park. Just one and a half blocks from home, a young woman texting hit the pair, killing Calli Ann instantaneously and critically injuring her mother.

"Even though we lost her, we want everything that happened because of it to change other people's behavior, and to think about what they're doing and how they're doing it. And why it's so important to not."

-Al Andres, grandfather of Calli

"Texting is in its own universe of risk," says Rich Hanowski, manager of the Virginia Tech study. The Center for Disease Control finds that of all high school students 16 years of age and older, nearly half admit to texting, emailing, or even surfing the web

while behind the wheel. This phenomenon's risk is quantified by the New York Times, which cites a study that found that over a period of 18 months, texting drivers had a collision rate 23 times higher than their focused counterparts.

But despite the risks, teens don't see the threat; 77% of teens are very or somewhat confident in their texting-while-driving abilities, and 55% claim that the task is easy. Ph.D. Fernando Wilson at the UNMC College of Public Health explains that because texting while driving is so pervasive in society, high school students don't view it in a negative light.

If we're going to preserve the safety of our youth, that has to change. We need additional legislation and increased social awareness, because our kids are worth it. And so are their victims.

"It's not like seat belt usage and securing your child into a safety seat. If you don't do these things, which are now the social norm – it's viewed negatively...with cell phone, we don't have that social stigma."

-Fernando Wilson



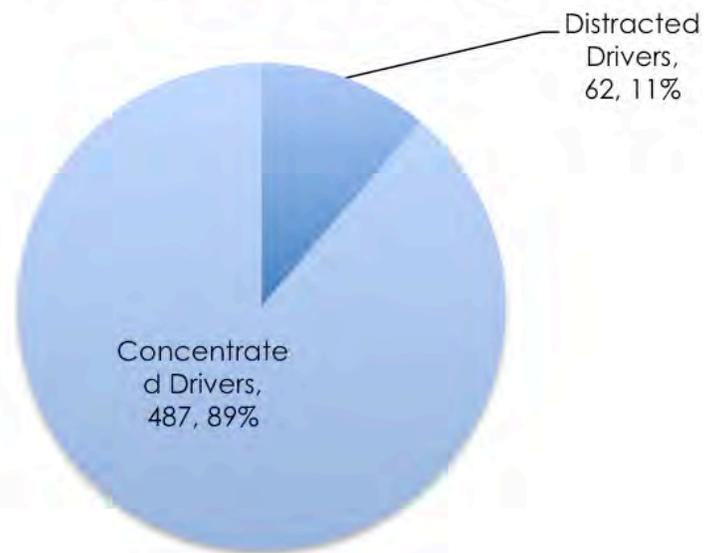
We took a look for ourselves.

On November 17, 2013, students from North Allegheny Senior High School conducted a survey to see the amount of distracted drivers in their local area. The survey was conducted at the intersection of Nicholson Road, a local road and Wexford Bayne Road, a road leading to a major highway, increasing the variety of driver types- both those making local trips and those venturing farther. The survey was conducted on a Sunday at approximately 2:00 PM. Data collected showed that 62 out of 487 drivers or 12.7% were qualified as "distracted". Out of the total distracted drivers, 32 were using cell phones, 26 were eating at the time, and 4 were engaged in various other activities. Drivers of all ages were observed, though the typical demographic

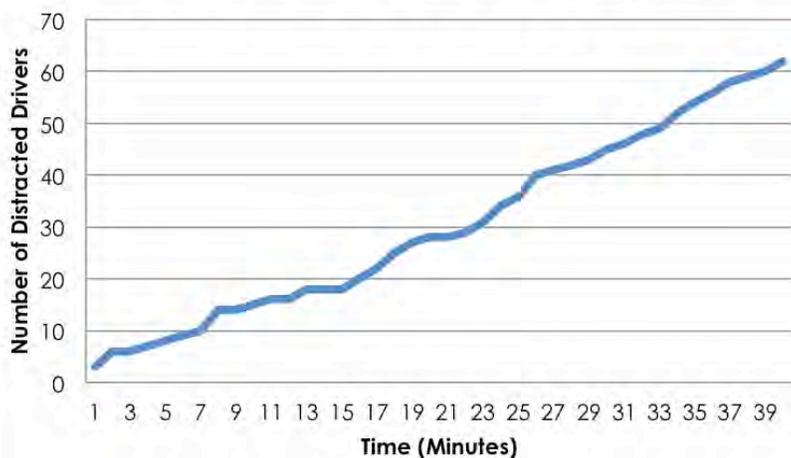
of distracted drivers includes women and teenagers.

The National Safety Council defines "distracted driving" as "any visual, cognitive, or manual distraction that takes a driver's attention away from the primary task of safely operating a motor vehicle", and also states that distracted driving is a contributing factor in about 80 percent of all motor vehicle accidents. According to 2011 data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "69% of drivers in the United States ages 18-64 reported that they had talked on their cell phone while driving within the 30 days before they were surveyed, and 31% of U.S. drivers ages 18-64 reported that they had read or sent text messages or email messages while driving at least once within the 30 days before they were surveyed".

Percentage of Distracted Drivers vs. Concentrated Drivers



Total Number of Distracted Drivers

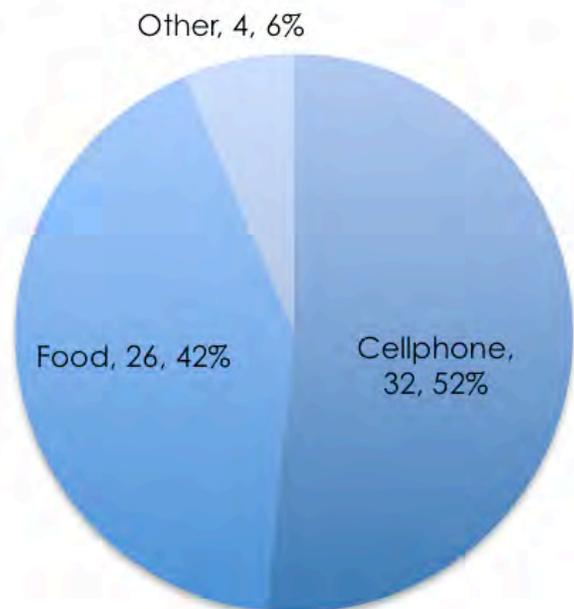


Statistics are all well and good, but our analysis of this study creates a more accurate picture of the true dangers of distracted driving. The location of the study is of considerable significance; while relatively few drivers were distracted, the fact that many were about to enter the highway greatly increases the amount of danger to all on the road. Most individuals eat lunch around the survey's timeframe, most likely accounting for the large amount of drivers (41.9% of the distracted subjects) were involved in eating at the wheel.

Additionally, the low overall percentage of distracted drivers may in part be caused by the day of the week and time at which the survey was conducted, as most individuals are at home during the afternoon on the weekend. It is more likely that a driver will be distracted during rush hour, when traffic generally moves slowly. However, when the roads are emptier, traffic can move more smoothly, lessening the temptation for a driver to reach for a phone.

Distraction.gov states "Engaging in visual-manual subtasks (such as reaching for a phone, dialing and texting) associated with the use of hand-held phones and other portable devices increased the risk of getting into a crash by three times." With even 12.5% of drivers on the road distracted, the danger present is obvious. While most often the consequences of distracted driving may merely be swerving or slower braking time, driving while texting or making a call increases the likelihood that a resulting crash would be fatal; in 2011, ten percent of fatal crashes involved distracted drivers in some manner. With a total of 12.5% of drivers distracted in any manner, the numbers fall well below the national averages for either drivers distracted by making calls or sending text messages or emails. However, these numbers are still far too high for safety-- a single distracted driver can endanger numerous lives. In 2012, 3,328 people were killed in distraction-related accidents. While most states have legislation regarding distracted driving, more must be done. States without distracted driving legislation (such as Montana, South Carolina, and South Dakota) should have, at minimum, a general ban on texting while driving. Too many lives have been changed irreparably by distracted driving; hopefully, by enforcing laws and encouraging awareness, the dangers of distracted driving can be put in the past.

Most Observed Distractions



So what can you do?

Plan in advance.

Eat, drink, text, call – set out a little earlier and get these things out of the way. Make your adjustments to radio stations and the AC before you put the car in drive. You can be safe and still drive in comfort.



Set a limit.

Goofing off with your friends is great, but goofing is usually distracting. Limit the distractions by limiting the number of people allowed in the car.

Eliminate temptation.

Your ringing phone two feet away from you is a lot more tempting than your silent phone thrown in the backseat. Power down devices and stow them.

And remember:
if it's that important,
pull over.