



NEWS FLASH: YOU MIGHT CRASH

According to the NHTSA and VTTI, 80% of car collisions and 65% of near collisions are caused by some form of distracted driving. Distracted Driving is defined as a driver engaging in an activity that might divert his attention from the primary task of driving-- therefore, increasing the risk of a crash. On average these distractions occur within three seconds before the vehicle crashes. Prevalent and commonly occurring distractions include, but are not limited too, cell phone use, reaching for a moving object inside a vehicle, looking at an object or event outside of a vehicle, reading, applying makeup, eating, and daydreaming. In recent years, Distracted driving has become an increasingly dangerous endemic in our nation. Can a momentary diversion really have widespread and fatal consequences and more importantly how can we put the brakes on distracted driving?

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Distracted driving is a common occurrence in every nook and cranny of our nation from isolated small towns to populated big cities. In fact, recently in my own community, my friend was hit by a car as she was crossing a heavy-traffic intersection just a few blocks from her home. She suffered multiple injuries including tremendous bruising on her back, several deep wounds, a multitude of superficial scratches, and a concussion. Luckily, the accident was not fatal. The woman who had struck her, had not seen the girl. Incidentally, seconds before the crash the woman had been talking on the phone. In the state of Florida there are several, notoriously tragic incidents that have occurred due to distracted driving. For instance, on March 9th 2010, 19 year old, Chelsey Murphey and her unborn child were killed when a teen driver talking on his cellphone struck her as she was crossing an intersection near her home in Naples, FL. Also, in Citra, FL, on September 23rd 2008, 13 year old, Morgay Schee was riding home from school when a semi-truck plowed into the back of her school bus. Schee was thrown under the bus's seats. She was killed when rescuers where unable to get her out of the burning wreckage. The truck driver had been driving at around 60 mph and claims he had not seen the school bus. He had been talking on the phone seconds before the collision. In 2008, about 6,000 people died due to distracted driving, including Heather Hurd. On January 3rd 2008, Hurd and her fiancée were scheduled to meet her parents at their wedding planners office. On the way, a tractor trailer speeding at 65 mph hit their car (as well 8 other cars) while they were stopped at a red light. The truck driver, who had been texting his company at the moment of the accident, never even applied the breaks. Heather died at the scene. Many other tragic incidents have occurred and continue to occur up to this very day.

Distracted driving endangers the safety of drivers, passengers, and bystanders. This epidemic has a major impact on society as it claims the lives of thousands yearly and shatters the hearts of the victim's loved ones who must contend with difficulties of their loss. In 2011, alone

3,331 people were killed in crashes while 387,000 suffered from trauma compared to the 3,267 fatal crashes and 416,000 injured victims in 2010. Notably, 10% of all injury crashes in 2011 were reported as distraction affected crashes. Sadly, distracted driving takes a huge toll on the younger population of drivers. In fact, 11% of all drivers under the age of 20 involved in fatal crashes were reportedly distracted at the time of the crash. This cohort of drivers has the largest proportion of distracted drivers. In addition, for drivers aged 15-19 involved in fatal crashes, 21% of drivers were distracted by cellphone use (NHTSA). Cellphones are clearly one of the most common driving distractions. Verily, since 2010, at any given point of daylight, 66,000 citizens across the US are using cellphones or handing similar electronic devices while driving (NOPUS). Moreover, studies have shown that 1/4 of teens respond to one or more text messages every time they drive. To boot, 20% of teens and 10% of parents admit to having extensive, multi-message conversations while driving.

One of the simplest ways to reduce the number of accidents caused by distracted driving is to advocate alert and safe driving behavior. An advocate is a person who publicly supports or recommends a particular cause or policy. By promoting safe driving, an advocate protects the lives of others. Focused drivers avoid texting, talking on the phone, or engaging in any other distractions while driving. A good passenger who points out that a driver is being irresponsible with his inattentiveness is also an advocate. As responsible citizens concerned with public safety, advocates encourage other members of the community, such as friends and family members, to drive without frivolous interferences such as cellphone use, daydreaming, eating, etc. By promoting proper driving habits, the number of common road distractions can be significantly reduced.

Currently, many states are passing laws to inhibit the increasingly menacing numbers of distracted drivers. Many of these laws target cellphone use. In the state Florida, as of October 1st, texting while driving has been banned. However,

this law, as well as the legislative actions taken in other states, may not produce the desired effects because, despite the efforts, the imposed fines do not candidly highlight the importance of concentrating while driving. Florida's law against texting for instance, is merely a secondary law. In other words, an officer can only issue a ticket if a driver has been pulled over for another violation such as speeding. Also, the established fine has been set at, the generally small amount of, \$30. These enactments do not seem appropriate to many, when compared to the thousands of lives that are put at risk, daily.

Distracted driving is common because many Americans are not aware of the danger it poses. On the other hand, many Americans are aware of the possible ramifications but chose to be inattentive while driving because they make the mistake of believing that the statistics do not apply to them. Moreover, others lead hectic and extremely preoccupied lives and use cell phones and smart phones to communicate with their families, friends, and colleagues/ work places. Thus, they forget or choose not to shut down these devices when they are driving.

States need to crack down on distracted driving by passing laws (preferably primary) banning texting and cellphone use when driving. The consequences should be much harsher including higher fines, possible jail time, community service, or any other incentive deemed appropriate. In addition, schools should educate teens about the dangers of distracted driving. Similarly, in order to acquire a license a person must take a mandated comprehensive attentive driving course and a avoiding distractions section should be added to the license test, to that ensures the tester understands how to remain concentrated while driving. Educating the public, accompanied with proper legislative action, is an effective method of lower distracted driving rates. A knowledgeable society that is fully aware of the possible implications of reckless driving, the supportive effort of a plethora of safe driving advocates, and proper legislation, putting the breaks on weapons of mass distractions is not only possible but probable.

PUT THE BREAKS ON DISTRACTED DRIVING

Calli Ann Murray, age 2; Erica Forney, age 9; Joe Teater, age 12; Eric Okerblom, age 19; Cady Reynolds, age 16; John Sligting, age 56. Despite their age gaps all of these people have one thing in common. All of these people, every single one of them, was killed in an accident involving a distracted driver. Some instantly, others agonizing days later, but all of them were killed and they are never coming back. Despite this, despite the lives that have been lost, and those that we will continue to lose; distracted driving is becoming ever more present in America. The CDC reports that daily – not annually, not monthly, and not weekly, but daily – 9 people are killed in distracted driving instances in the U.S. alone, not to mention that another 1,060 are injured...daily. Maybe, you never thought about it. Maybe, you do it yourself. Maybe, you have never done it at all. Maybe, you do not even drive yet. But no matter the case, it is our responsibility as human beings, as American citizens, as friends and loved ones, to make sure that we and the ones we know and love do not drive distracted. It is our responsibility to end distracted driving and make sure that it never comes back.

The woman who struck two year old Calli Ann Murray and her mother, killing Calli instantly and sending her mother to the hospital in critical condition, certainly did not have her mind on driving. She was texting when she hit the two four blocks from their home on December 1, 2010. The woman who hit nine year old Erica Forney at 25 miles per hour in her Ford Expedition, just a stone's throw away from Erica's house, was also distracted. The woman, a neighbor of Erica's, had looked down at her cell phone after finishing a call and never saw the young girl in her path. Erica flew 15 feet, first smashing into the cars windscreen and then landing on her neck. Erica was hit on November 25, 2008; she died two days later on Thanksgiving Day. The list goes on. The woman that hit 12 year old Joe Teater and his mother, as they made their way to an afterschool event just one mile away from their home, was on the phone and did not realize that the light was red

despite passing six cars and a school bus that had stopped for it alongside her. She ran the red light and her 3½ ton hummer careened into the side of the car carrying Joe Teater and his mother. Joe Teater died a day later on January 20, 2004. On July 25, 2009, 19-year old Eric Okerblom was struck from behind by a truck traveling at 60 mph while riding his bike on a long straight road; he was clearly visible. The driver at first denied being distracted, but court-ordered phone records showed that he had in fact been texting right before the accident. On May 30, 2007 Cady Reynolds, age 16, was struck by another teenage driver who had been texting and had run a red light at 50 mph. Cady was rushed to the hospital with critical injuries, she died the next day. On June 13, 2007 John Sligting, age 56, was riding his motorcycle home from work, helmet, safety chaps and all, when a teenage driver who was talking on the phone rolled through a stop sign and directly into the path of his motorcycle. John was launched over the car and onto the hard asphalt on the other side; he later died.

These are the stories of the victims of distracted driving, these are the stories that move us and prompt us to pose the question "how do we stop it, how do we stop the pandemic of distracted driving?" Many states have enacted laws against texting and driving or other forms of distracted driving. Textinganddrivingsafety.com reports that 10 states have prohibited all drivers from using hand held cell phones, 32 states prohibit novice drivers from cell phone use, and 39 states prohibit all drivers from text messaging.

However, some are not all that convinced that laws banning texting while driving are the answer. Researchers at Cohen Children's Medical Center in New Hyde Park, including Dr. Andrew Adesman, who have been studying distracted driving, found laws prohibiting cell phone usage in a motor vehicle to be of little to no use. "When we compared states where there are no laws in effect [barring texting while operating a moving vehicle] and states where there are laws on the books, we found there was no difference in their

responses," Adesman said. "Clearly, the laws are not effective." So if laws are not the answer then what is?

Well, one mother's alternative was to educate others by using her son's death as a lesson – her goal: change the way society views distracted driving. That mother's name was Sharon Heit. Her son, Alexander Heit, a 22-year old student at the University of Northern Colorado, was in the process of sending a text message when he veered into oncoming traffic and lost control of his vehicle, rolling it off the road. "I can't bear the thought of anyone else having to go through something like this," Sharon Heit said in a statement later released by the police. "In a split second you could ruin your future, injure or kill others, and tear a hole in the heart of everyone who loves you," she added. In the same article on nydailynews.com, Police chief Jerry Garner told the local newspaper, The Greeley Tribune, "The Heits are sharing their tragedy and loss, in hope that through Alex's story, others may realize and recognize just how dangerous texting and driving is." So, what exactly did the Heit's share? They shared Alexander's last words, "Sounds good my man, seeya soon, ill tw," quite an insignificant text and hardly a fair trade for the life of a bright young man.

As a society we have strong taboos against things like unprotected sex and drinking and driving (DUI). Now it is time to include driving while distracted (DWD) in that list of taboos. After all, according to the NHTSA, "Driving a vehicle while texting is six times more dangerous than driving while intoxicated." Unfortunately, laws only go so far and people somehow think that they are exempt from the statistics but if we can change the way society views distracted driving, if we can change the perception of the nation, we might just stand a chance at ridding America of its latest pandemic. So go out there and spread the stories, the stories of those that have died needless deaths, those whose stories can be used to save others. Then, we might just stand a chance at ending distracted driving and making sure that it never comes back.

WEAPONS OF MASS DISTRACTIONS

Distracted driving has caused about 3,340 deaths in 2012 alone. In 2011, 3,331 deaths involved distracted driving compared to 3,267 in 2010. This is a problem that has progressed throughout the years and the numbers never seem to stop increasing. You may ask yourself what is the cause? Have oncoming generations become careless? Or have the laws against distracted driving not been implemented enough? All it takes is a few seconds of being distracted and your life can change completely.

The survey conducted asked people their gender, age, driving habits, and the average amount of distracted drivers they see a day. The results were astounding all though the survey was only done locally. The results showed that females between the ages of 20 to 49 and males from 15 to 49 have been doing activities deemed distracting while driving. Using a cell phone was the choice chosen the most between people of all ages.

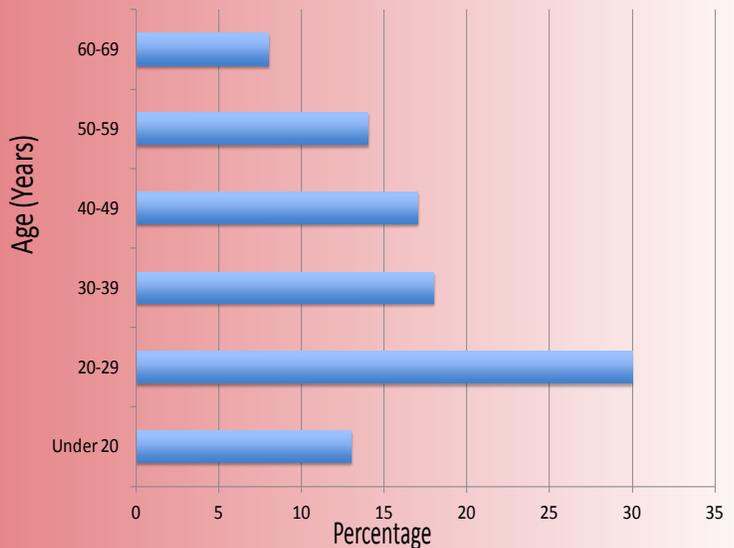
In the survey conducted, 83% of drivers ages 15 to 65 reported that they used their cell phone while driving. In 2011 the CDC Distracted Driving Study researched the percentage of drivers that used their cell phones while driving a vehicle. The results were that 69% of drivers in the United States ages 18 to 64 used their cell phone while driving. In 2011, 23% of car crashes involved cell phones. The act of dialing on your cell phone alone increases your risk of getting into a car crash by 2.8%. Talking or listening while driving increases the risk by 1.3% and reaching for a device by 1.4%.

In the local survey there is a clear pattern that younger drivers are more likely to crash because of distractions. The three main types of distractions are taking your eyes off the road, letting the wheel go, and daydreaming while driving. The Safe America Drivers Foundation found that 11% of drivers under the age of 20 involved in fatal crashes were distracted at the time of the accident. In the survey conducted, 93% of the people have been in a car with a distracted driver yet only 47% have told the driver something about it. This compares to 48% of American kids ages 12 to 17 have been in a car with a distracted driver and 48% of young drivers have seen their parents drive while talking on the cell phone.

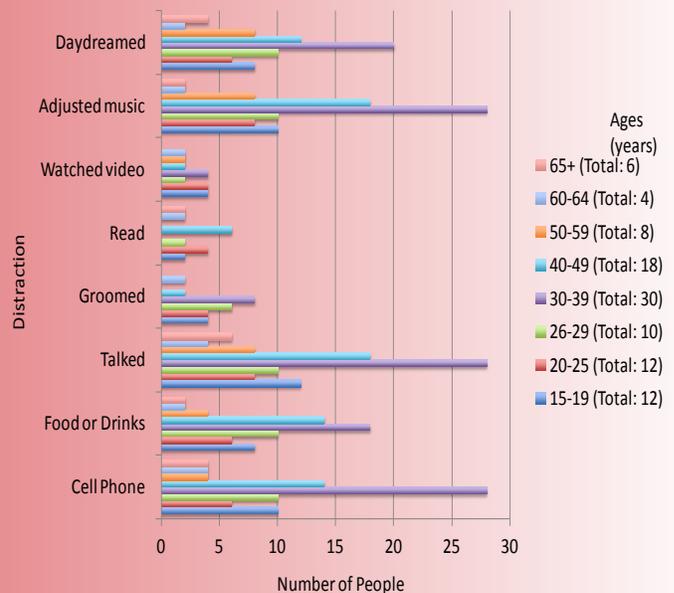
With so many campaigns against distracted driving why are the numbers so high when it comes to this particular subject? States should be more serious about distracted driving laws and implement them more. It is not only for the safety of society but for the driver also. What is waiting a few minutes to answer a text if it might save your life?



Distracted Drivers in the Nation



Local Distracted Drivers



A red car is shown with a severely damaged windshield, which is shattered into many sharp, jagged pieces of glass. The car's body is also crumpled and distorted. A large, red, multi-pointed starburst graphic is overlaid on the lower right portion of the image, containing the text.

SAFE DRIVING TIPS

1. Finish dressing/grooming at home
2. Don't eat food while driving
3. Place cell phones aside
4. Don't drive if your mind is somewhere else
5. Adjust AC settings and music before hitting the road
6. If children are in the vehicle, make sure they are comfortable before you begin to drive
7. Don't daydream
8. Keep both hands on the wheel
9. Check your route before driving
10. Be 100% focused on the road and everything around you