

One text or call can end it all. Leaving ones food, makeup kit, or cellphone on the dashboard can save lives, but the simple action of picking up and using one of these items, even for an instant, can take lives just as easily. With this in mind, it's important to understand what distracted driving is and why it can be so harmful on the road. Distracted driving is the act of driving while engaged in other activities that take the driver's attention away from the road, such

as looking after children, texting, using a cell phone, eating, or reading. Distractions while driving can be separated into three distinct groups: visual, manual, and cognitive. Visual distraction involves taking one's eyes off the road, manual distraction involves taking one's hands off the wheel, and cognitive distraction involves an individual's focus not being directly on the act of driving, allowing his mind to wander. All three types of distractions compromise the safety of not

only the driver, but passengers, bystanders, and other individuals on the road and in the surrounding environment. While all distractions can have dire consequences, some are more deadly than others. Distractions influenced by technology, especially text messaging or talking on the phone, require a combination of visual, manual, and cognitive attention from the driver, thus making these types of distractions particularly dangerous (and, sadly, these are the most prevalent). According to the United States Department of Transportation, “text messaging while driving creates a crash risk 23 times higher than driving while not distracted.” Despite these statistics, more than 37% of drivers have admitted to sending or receiving text messages while driving, and 18% admit doing so regularly. The amount of distracted driving, and the severe side effects of same, needs to be stopped. This article aims to show how tragic it is that distracted driving is so prevalent in today’s society.

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Before you even think you should answer that phone call, you might want to know that distracted drivers are 3 times more likely to be in a crash than attentive drivers. (1) Cell phones are among the most common distractions. Texting is the worst form of distraction due to the number of people involved and the length of time it takes to do. Don’t believe that? Statistics show that drivers engaged in text messaging are 23 times more likely to be involved in a crash or near crash event compared with non-distracted drivers. (2) Statistics also show that sending or receiving a text takes the driver’s eyes away from the road for an average of 4.6 seconds. At 55 mph, that is the equivalent of driving a football field—BLIND. (3) Those two statistics are good reasons not to pick up your phone while driving. If you had no knowledge of these statistics, it is very likely that many others do not

know as well. In fact, 1 out of 5 young drivers think that texting has no difference in their driving performance. (4) This means that in our society, there is a lack of education about how distracted driving can affect their lives. Many people use several justifications in order to say that it’s ok to drive while distracted. One might say, “I can still drive if I’m texting, talking, etc.” This is the multitasking argument, the most common one. People who use this argument think that driving is such a menial task that they can divert some of their attention to another object. However, driving is a very involved task: you use your eyes, hands, and mind to drive. All distractions take away your ability to do any of these three tasks. This leaves no room for multitasking. Another argument that people use, “I’m an experienced driver”, does not stand well due to the lack of attention involved in distraction.



A less experienced, but alert driver would avoid an accident better than an experienced, but distracted driver due to the distraction greatly decreasing the reaction time of the experienced driver. The worst argument to justify texting is, “it’s only for a few seconds”, because an accident can happen in only a few seconds. A few seconds to react can either save your life, or condemn you to death due to the speed that vehicles can travel. People use justification because either they are uninformed, or they don’t care about hefty consequences.

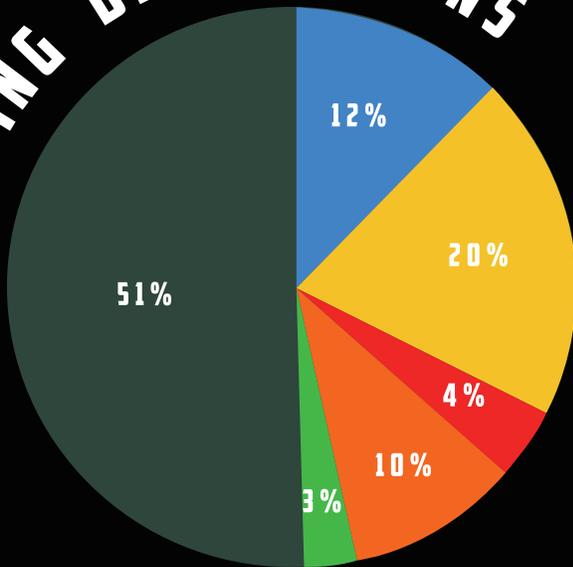
CONCLUSION: The major reason for distracted driving is an uninformed public. One major point of interest that the public is generally uninformed about is that headset cell phone use is not substantially safer than hand-held use. (5) A distracted mind IS one of the factors that qualifies for distracted driving. About ¼ of collisions could be avoided internationally if people were aware of their surroundings, for at least 1 in 4 collisions results from distracted driving. (6) Knowledge is power: if we educate people, the number of collisions would decrease dramatically.

BENJAMIN DANTON

1: Alberta Transportation, 2011
2: Virginia tech Transportation Institute, 2010
3: VTTI
4: NHTSA, 2011
5: VTTI
6: Alberta Transportation, 2011



DRIVING DISTRACTIONS



The distracted driving survey was conducted on a major highway. The survey was conducted using a tally system. The categories were texting, talking on the phone, eating, communicating with passenger, and miscellaneous distractions, such as grooming and music. We also observed the drivers, which had no distractions. As each car passed the distraction was observed and then tallied. The number of drivers we agreed on was 200. The survey was conducted on an unknown audience. None were aware that their actions were being observed. No restraints were used on those in the survey. The common variables were, they were all traveling on the same road, same time, same conditions. Once the survey was complete, we tallied our findings. We found twelve

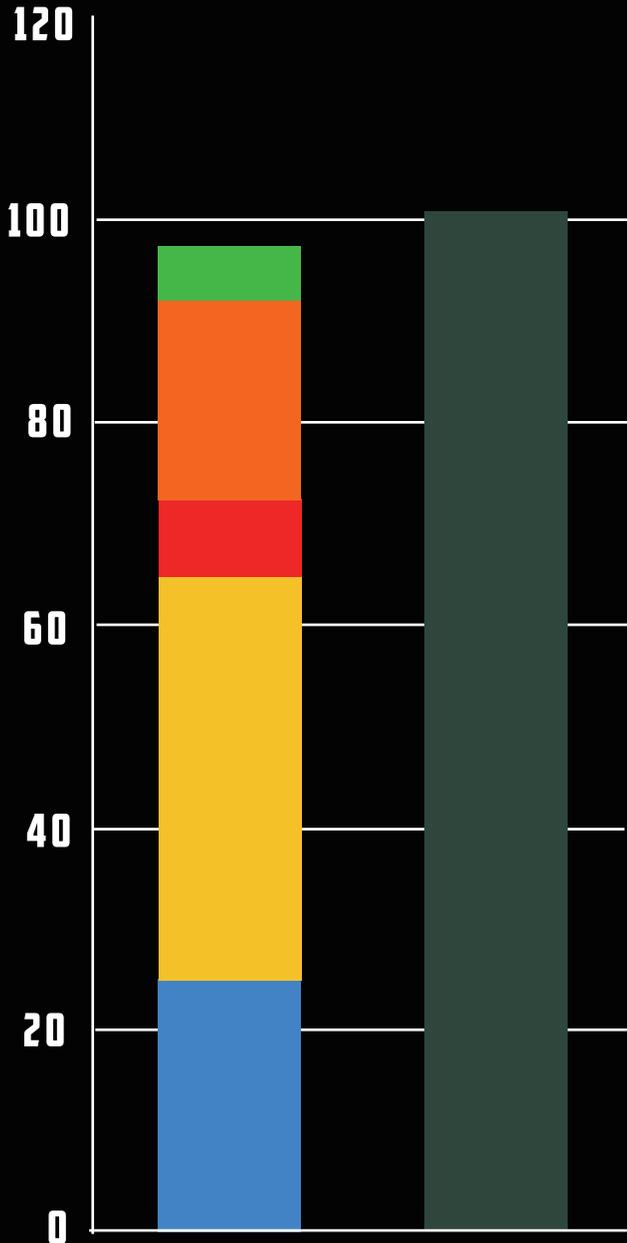
percent of the observed were texting, twenty percent were talking on the phone, four percent were eating, ten percent were talking to passengers, and three percent were performing other activities. Fifty one percent of the total observed had no distractions.

Our findings aided us in concluding that some sort of distraction accompanied approximately fifty percent of drivers in the area. Of the 200 drivers observed, twelve percent were texting. This equals the percent of people nationally who were involved in an accident caused by texting. Nationally phones are ranked as the number one distraction for drivers. In our survey we concluded the same outcome. More drivers were using their phones than being accompanied by any other dis-



traction. Through our test, we observed that half of the drivers are driving with distractions, which proves this a problem within the United States.

KYLE CLEVELAND



ADVOCACY TIPS:

1. If you need to take a phone call, pull off of the road to a safe place to avoid being distracted while you are driving
2. Eat before you get in the car, or after you arrive at your destination
3. Put your phone on silent before you start to drive, so you are not tempted to answer a text
4. Select the music you would like to listen to before you start driving
5. If there are passengers in your car, they should help you stay focused on driving, not distract you.

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