



The Dangers of Distracted Driving



by R. Michael Shickich

Talking on the phone. Sending a text. Using your GPS. Adjusting your stereo. Talking to passengers. All of these things can lead to distracted driving.

Distracted driving occurs when a driver is trying to do something else while driving and so does not give his or her full attention to the road. Although some may see these distractions as trivial, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that 9% of all traffic deaths (3,000 out of 33,000)

are caused by distracted drivers.

Given that new technologies like cell phones and GPS systems are a common source of distractions, it should come as no surprise that in 2010, 13% of the distracted drivers involved in fatal crashes were between 15 and 19 years old. However, teenagers are not the only culprits—48% of young drivers saw their parents talking on the phone while driving, and another 15% saw their parents texting while driving.

Many of these crashes involved sending or receiving a text. Looking at the average text takes your eyes off of the road for almost five seconds. At 55 miles per hour, this is the equivalent of driving the length of an entire football field without looking where you're going.

A number of different approaches are being taken to try to reduce the amount of distracted driving. Many states have enacted laws forbidding texting while driving and all cell phone usage by novice drivers, and several states limit cell phone usage for all drivers to hands-free devices so that the driver can keep his or her eyes on the road.

Some states are enforcing their vehicular manslaughter laws against those who kill someone because they were driving while



distracted. For more information, go to www.distraction.gov.

Parents should try to set a good example for their children by not allowing themselves to be distracted while driving. Many parents are asking their teen drivers to sign a "safe driving contract," where the teen pledges not to talk or text while driving and to do other things to increase safety, such as wear a seatbelt and not drive with someone who has been drinking.

There is nothing you need to say or see that is worth risking your life or the lives of others. Remember to "Put It Down" when you're driving.

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