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Transportation Safety Topics

Transportation

Deadly distractions.



Drive safely.
Drive responsibly.
Drive professionally.

Remember—A DISTRACTED DRIVER IS A DANGEROUS DRIVER! Don't be one of them.

Multitasking (doing more than one thing at the same time) is actually encouraged in some situations, but driving isn't one of them. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration released the results of a study done by the Virginia Polytechnic Transportation Institute, and they graphically show that drivers driving while distracted are a real and present danger to themselves and everyone else on the highway near them.

Because most people think that driving is a reflex action like breathing or blinking, they believe that they can do other things like talking on cell phones, operating laptop computers or "blackberries," eating, drinking or watching their GPS device. The study equipped 100 vehicles with cameras and recording devices and the researchers observed 241 drivers, ages 18-55, in the Washington D.C. area for a period of one year; all drivers knew they were being watched. The study recorded 82 vehicle crashes, 761 near-crashes and 8,295 incidents which required an evasive maneuver.

One 18-year-old female had 3 crashes, 53 near-crashes and 401 incidents, while another 41-year-old female was involved in 4 crashes, 56 near-crashes and 449 incidents. Using wireless communication devices was the number one distraction observed. The Virginia Tech researchers thought that 25% to 30% of crashes might involve some type of driver distraction. However, the study showed that 80% of the crashes involved some type of distraction or drowsiness three seconds prior to the crash.

As professional drivers we deal with distracted drivers every day; we have learned to recognize them and whenever

possible, avoid them. We know they put themselves and us at risk, but how many times are we driving while distracted? Distraction is "something that interferes with concentration or takes attention away from something else." Anything that takes away your concentration needs to be eliminated when driving. Driving requires 100% of your attention 100% of the time! Many states have already banned texting while driving, and there is now proposed rulemaking banning the use of any handheld cell phones in commercial vehicles.

What can distract us while driving? Cell phones, computers and in some cases two-way radios can all provide distractions; even "hands-free" phones or radios are distracting. Never try to use any handheld or laptop computer when driving. Eating or drinking while driving is unsafe and not good for your digestion either. Take a meal break by getting out of your vehicle and take the time to enjoy a meal. You'll be safer, healthier and more rested.

Reading maps or directions to locations should be part of your pretrip preparation, not something you do while driving. At 60 mph you will travel 88 feet per second, and in the time it takes to glance at a map or GPS for directions, you have the potential to be involved in a serious crash. Normal things like adjusting your seat or your mirrors should be done while stopped, not going down the highway. TVs, VCRs, MP3s, video games and other electronics should never be used while driving; they are a distraction and in some cases illegal. Passengers, pets and even scenery can be a distraction and can be a contributing factor to a disastrous crash.

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