



You're 23 times more likely to crash if you text while driving!

## Employers: With a Zero-tolerance Policy, we can end Distracted Driving in the workplace!

### Understanding the Distracted Brain

Even driving while using hands-free cell phones is risky behavior.

**Why is it so risky?** A classic case of inattention blindness (similar to tunnel vision) caused by cognitive distraction of a cell phone conversation. Vision is most important when driving, but hands-free phone users have a tendency to “look at” but not “see” objects. Statistics show that hands free cell phone users fail to see 50% of the information in their driving environment. Drivers are looking out the windshield but do not process everything in the roadway environment that they need to know to effectively monitor their surroundings, seek and identify potential hazards, and respond to unexpected situations. More than 285.6 million wireless subscribers in the U.S. have begun to agree against cell phone use while driving, but also admit (11% of drivers at any given time) to regularly talking while driving. National Safety Council estimates one in four crashes involve cell phone use at the time of the crash. Only a few states have passed legislation making it illegal to use handheld cell phone while driving, which gives the impression their safe.

**According to National Safety Council, motor vehicle crashes are No. 1 cause of death in the U.S. for 3 to 34 year olds.** Also the number one cause of work related death. More than 650,000 lives lost in the past 15 years alone, not to mention the toll of injuries. Cell phone usage was at 13% in 1995 to now a whopping 91% in 2009. Talking on cell phones is more common than texting and causes more crashes. (i.e. In 2008, estimated 200,000 crashes involved texting or e-mailing, versus 1.4 million crashes involving talking on cell phones). A disturbing fact if your company allows talking on hands-free devices.

Hands-free devices do not eliminate cognitive distraction. The longer the phone call, the higher the risk increases. Fact is; hands-free phones offer no safety benefit when driving.

National Safety Council says: **“Multitasking drains the brain”**. Although multitasking is valued in today’s culture and the sense of increased productivity makes it tempting to use cell phones behind the wheel. **There are two truths:** 1. People actually did not “multitask” 2. People did not accomplish both tasks with optimal focus and effectiveness. **Multitasking is a myth.** Human brains do not perform two tasks at the same time. Instead you are switching from one activity to another. The brain engages in the process of 1) Select, 2) Process, 3) Encode, & 4) Store. Then two more cognitive functions: 5) Retrieve, and 6) Execute. When the brain is overloaded all steps are affected. You are literally juggling focus and attention and this is where “inattention blindness” is developed. Slowed reaction time to potential hazards is what you get.

Example: Car traveling 40 mph, it goes 120 feet before stopping. This is equal to 8 car lengths (an average car is 15 feet). A fraction-of-a-second delay would make the car travel several additional car lengths. When a driver needs to react immediately, there is no margin for error.

Brains may face “bottleneck”. This is when two usually unrelated activities become interrelated when a person is behind the wheel. There are limits to our mental workload.

The workload of information processing can bring risks. Average driver can slow down, check rear-view mirror, activate turn signals as they approach a light and many of us do this automatically without much thought. **But it’s being prepared for the unexpected.** And overload processing can delay a quick response in an unexpected hazard, thus increasing risk of injury. People do not perform well when trying to perform two attention-demanding tasks at the same time. Listening and language comprehension draws cognitive resources away from driving by 37% according to a Carnegie Mellon University Study.

Danger of inattention blindness is when a driver fails to notice events while driving either at all or too late. A slower response time and reaction time is a fact, as well as trouble staying in the lanes while talking. Distracted driving delay is equal to .08% blood alcohol level.

What can employers do? Adopt a cell phone or portable electronic equipment policy to protect your workers. Free cell phone policy kit:

[http://www.nsc.org/safety\\_road/Distracted\\_Driving/Pages/EmployerPolicies.aspx](http://www.nsc.org/safety_road/Distracted_Driving/Pages/EmployerPolicies.aspx)



**Distracted driving is any activity that could divert a person's attention away from the primary task of driving. All distractions endanger driver, passenger, and bystander safety.**

**Distracted three ways:**

**Manual-- taking your hands off the wheel**

**Visual—taking your eyes off the road**

**Cognitive---taking your mind off driving**

**Types of distractions:**

**Texting—***(requires visual, manual, and cognitive attention from the driver—most alarming distraction)* Takes the drivers eyes off the road 4.6 seconds, equivalent at 55 mph of driving the length of an entire football field, blind.

**Using a cell phone or smartphone—***(hand held devices are 4 times more likely to get into crashes serious enough to injure themselves)* driving while using a cell phone reduces the amount of brain activity associated with driving by 37%.

**Eating or drinking—**Can take your hands, eyes, and mind off of driving.

**Talking to passengers—**Takes your mind off your driving, and sometimes your eyes.

**Grooming—**you get the idea. Be prepared when you leave in the morning, or wait until you arrive to groom yourself.

**Reading, including maps—**Know ahead of time where you are going, or have your passenger help direct you.

**Using a navigation system—**Listening to your navigation system, or trying to program it while driving is dangerous! Prepare before you leave.

**Watching a video—**Don't watch while driving.

**Adjusting a radio, CD player, or MP3 player---**Again, prepare to listen before you leave and keep it turned down enough you can concentrate.

**Most serious offenders?** Our youngest and most inexperienced drivers at risk, with 16% of all distracted driving crashes involving drivers under 20.

What can you do for your co-worker? If you are commuting to a meeting, have a policy in place. Sometimes we all need a gentle reminder. Discuss changes at work and on personal time. We want you all safe!!

When a Motor Vehicle Accident occurs on the clock, who will admit to texting? Police investigations can help find the truth. If it's a policy, this won't be necessary.

If you rely on your phone for work, allow drivers to pull over safely if they need to make that call or text for work related reasons.

Have an open discussion. Do you need to update your policy? Are new hires aware of your policy?

