

The Dangers of Distracted Driving

Maanasa Gurram

What is the most common cause of distracted driving? How many car accidents are caused by distracted driving? What can you do to help prevent distracted driving?

“Lol.” “What’s up?” “Btw...” Text messages as simple as these can do damage as drastic as taking a life. Accidents caused by distracted driving are entirely preventable, yet they occur so often. At least nine are claimed by distracted driving every day and approximately 3,500 per year (The Zebra, 2020). In the state of Idaho, there’s a traffic crash every 22 minutes and one person is killed as a result of a traffic crash every 40 hours (The Advocates Law, 2019). There are three main causes of distracted driving: visual, manual and cognitive. Visual refers to the driver taking their eyes off the road, manual refers to the driver taking their hands off the wheel, and cognitive refers to the driver taking their mind off driving.

An especially dangerous type of distraction is texting while driving. It takes the driver’s eyes off the road for around five seconds, which is long enough to cover an entire football field at a speed of 55 mph (CDC Motor Vehicle Safety, 2019). As the use of technology grows, it becomes increasingly habitual for teens and even adults to succumb to the temptations of their phone, whether it be a text, call, or an app. The driver’s brain activity associated with driving is reduced by 37 percent due to cell phone use when behind the wheel (Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia Research Institute, 2020). In addition, distractions such as sleep deprivation, eating/drinking, and even mind wandering can be just as dangerous as phone usage.

When a driver engages in distracted driving, they are not only putting themselves at risk but also the other passengers of the car as well as everyone on the roads. For this reason, it is crucial that action is taken to reduce the number of vehicle accidents. Many states are implementing laws in order to address this issue. As of March 2019, hand-held phone use has been banned in 16 states and texting while driving is banned in 47 states (The Zebra, 2020). Advocating for these laws to be passed in all 50 states and stricter enforcement of the policies could help reduce accidents caused by hand-held phone use and texting while driving. In addition, there are many initiatives that can be taken on a smaller level to make a difference. New drivers should be given very clear instructions by their mentors. They should be advised to check any calls or texts before starting the car and keeping their phone out of reach while they

are driving. Encouraging good habits from the beginning is easier than having to change bad habits. More experienced drivers should set a good example. Younger drivers may engage in bad habits if they see experienced drivers doing so. In addition, all members of the community should be aware of the dangers of distracted driving and stay active in supporting effective policies. Ultimately, before picking up that phone or searching for that snack, it's worth thinking twice about whether it's worth the loss of a life.

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