



Distracted drivers encouraged to “Put It Down” to help prevent accidents, save lives

### **Distracted driving.**

What motivates people to *not* pay attention to the road while driving? What can help drivers understand why engaging in other activities, especially texting or talking on their cell phone, does not allow them to pay full attention to the road?

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) defines “distraction” as “a specific type of inattention that occurs when drivers divert their attention away from the task of driving to focus on another activity instead.”

These distractions can be electronic, such as navigation systems and cell phones, or more conventional, such as interacting with passengers and eating. These distracting tasks affect different drivers in different ways and are categorized into three types:

- **Visual** – taking your eyes off the road.
- **Manual** – taking your hands off the wheel.
- **Cognitive** – taking your mind off the road.

The following stresses the importance of building awareness of the problem, and offers suggestions and sources to encourage drivers to change their behavior for the better behind the wheel.

### **“Put It Down” – We’re All Part of the Solution**

“Put It Down” is a broad, public-private partnership of community and health groups, safety advocates, businesses, law enforcement, legislators, public officials, concerned citizens and those who have lost loved ones because of a distracted driver. These partners realize that eliminating distractions – like cell phone use – while driving will save lives and reduce costs associated with crashes caused by distracted drivers. Plus, because everyone is potentially affected when drivers are distracted, everyone must be part of the solution.

### **A Personal Responsibility**

With portable technology used now more than ever, driver distractions – and their results – have risen to unprecedented numbers:

- Drivers who use hand-held devices while driving are four times as likely to get into crashes serious enough to injure themselves or others.
- The proportion of drivers reportedly distracted at the time of the fatal crashes has increased from 8 percent in 2004 to 11 percent in 2008.
- One of the most commonly recognized distractions is cell phone use. Cell phone subscriptions have grown exponentially from 1988 through 2009. About 89 percent, or approximately 277 million of all Americans, have a cell phone, according to CTIA – The Wireless Association. For many, it is the only kind of telephone they possess. In a recent NHTSA survey, most individuals (77 percent) reported that they talk on the phone at least some of the time while driving.

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Today, people expect instant, real-time information 24 hours-a-day – and that desire does not stop because people get behind the wheel. Drivers simply do not realize the dangers posed when they take their eyes and minds off the road, and their hands off the wheel, to focus on activities other than driving.

Common sense and personal responsibility are a major part of the solution. Each driver must decide to “Put It Down” and pay attention to road. The risks are simply too high!

### **Young Drivers are Especially at Risk**

Younger, inexperienced drivers under age 20 have the highest proportion of distraction-related fatal crashes. Their lack of driving experience can contribute to critical misjudgments if they become distracted. Not surprisingly, they text more than any other age group and the number of young drivers who text is only increasing.

Because of this growing danger, it is important to address this issue sooner rather than later. Parents must set a good example for their children and show them from an early age it is not safe to text and/or talk on their phone while driving.

### **Learn More**

For more information and specific tools for the groups below, visit the “Get Involved” section of [www.distraction.gov](http://www.distraction.gov):

- Community Group Materials
- School Materials
- Parent Materials
- Employer Materials
- Law Enforcement Materials

### **Legislation**

As distracted driving has risen to unprecedented levels, state legislatures have started taking action. As of early 2010, 21 states had enacted graduated drivers licensing (GDL) laws. As of May 2010, six states, the District of Columbia and the Virgin Islands had banned hand-held cell phone use for all drivers, while 25 states, the District of Columbia and Guam banned texting by all drivers.

Texting laws are relatively new and have not been thoroughly evaluated. However, considering the rapid emergence of the problem and growing evidence showing the threat to the safety of all road users, safety advocates and state legislatures are compelled to move forward. Most texting legislation is based on the broad foundation of principles learned from seatbelt laws, impaired driving statutes and similar legislative initiatives, while more specific scientific evidence is being gathered. To view a sample law that would prohibit texting, please visit <http://distraction.gov/files/dot/texting-law-021910.pdf>

Since the prevalence of texting is particularly high among teens, legislatures may also choose to include specific consequences under their GDL law for texting violations by novice drivers, such as delayed full licensure.

### **High-Visibility Enforcement**

Research for similar campaigns shows high-visibility enforcement works because, with many distracted drivers, the fear of a citation and significant fine outweighs their fear of being injured or killed in a crash. History has shown for other issues, like seatbelt use, that when high-visibility enforcement programs were implemented to enforce state laws, positive results (like a dramatic increase in the number of seatbelt users) resulted. With a proven track record of success, this strategy should have the same effect on distracted drivers.

*Sources: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, CTIA – The Wireless Association*

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