



## Distracted Driving

Motor vehicle accidents are the most common cause of death in the U.S. with an average of about 40,000 traffic fatalities every year. A person dies in a crash every 11 minutes. According to the National Safety Council, the top six deadly choices that drivers often make are speeding, tailgating, right of way violations, improper turning, driving left of center, and distracted driving.

This handout is focusing on one of the six deadly choices: **Distracted Driving**. First, let us learn about the three types of distracted driving: manual, visual, and cognitive.

1. **Manual** distractions cause drivers to take their **HANDS** off the wheel.
2. **Visual** distractions cause drivers to take their **EYES** off the road.
3. **Cognitive** distractions cause drivers to take their **MINDS** off the road.

**Manual Distractions** include using the phone, eating or drinking, adjusting car controls, grooming, using the GPS, smoking, etc. Most states have implemented strict laws banning or limiting the use of cell phones while driving with many states allowing law enforcement to pull drivers over for cell phone violations. It is important that you become familiar with your state's specific cell phone laws.

**Visual Distractions** include texting, eating, picking up something you dropped on the car floor, adjusting controls, etc.

**Cognitive Distractions** include using the phone, talking to passengers, being upset or thinking about anything other than driving.

Note that many activities involve more than one distraction at the same time. **The worst offender is the cell phone, which involves all three distractions: manual, visual, and cognitive (the triple threat).** When it comes to cell phones, ask yourself the following questions:

- How often do you talk on the phone or use your phone while driving even though you know it is unsafe?
- How often do you see others using the phone while driving?
- How do you feel about being a passenger with a driver who is using a cell phone while driving?

Use of cell phones while driving continues to seriously injure and kill people at an alarming rate. Do your part and make a commitment to save lives and not use your cell phone while driving. No text is worth your life. Even hands-free is not safe since we are still cognitively distracted. Before you pick up your phone and make the decision to read or send a text, call a friend or client, or engage in any form of distracted driving, it is important to understand that you also place yourself at risk of litigation and other legal action. Many lawyers have moved to specialize in targeting traffic accident cases that may involve some type of distracted driving making the ramifications and potential costs of distracted driving astronomical.

Some of the signs that a driver is distracted include: Driving below the speed limit, swerving, pulling out in front of vehicles, running off the road, not stopping at a stop sign, driving through a red light, driving someplace you didn't intend to go (being on auto pilot), and not remembering a period of time while you were driving. One of the biggest problems with distractions is the impact it has on a driver's ability to react in time to prevent an accident. Being distracted affects your perception, reaction, and braking time. This makes your total stopping distance much further than a non-distracted driver does. The 3-Second Rule is commonly used to allow you to stop in time. It works like this: Watch for a vehicle ahead of you to pass a fixed object. As the rear of their vehicle passes, start counting. The front of your vehicle should not pass before you have finished counting to at least 3 seconds.

The National Safety Council's formula for Total Stopping Distance = Perception Distance + Reaction Distance + Braking Distance. To put it into better perspective, the typical distraction takes about 4 seconds, and if you were driving at 30 mph, your vehicle would travel 176 feet in the time you were distracted and not in total control of your vehicle. If you were driving 55 mph, your vehicle would travel 323 feet in the time you were distracted (that is the length of a football field!). If you were driving 70 mph, your vehicle would travel 411 feet in the time you were distracted and not in control. What would happen if you were distracted on a highway going 70 mph and a vehicle slammed the brakes on in front of you? Would you have a chance to react and stop in time? Remember, after you stop being distracted, you would then need to account for the total stopping distance (Perception Distance + Reaction Distance + Braking Distance), which at 70 mph is approximately 490 feet. Unless the vehicle was over 900 feet in front of you, you would have no chance to stop in time.

Here are some steps you can take to avoid distracted driving:

- Adjust controls before driving (mirrors, seat, radio, air conditioning, etc.).
- Program your GPS, read maps, and check traffic conditions before driving.
- Do not multi-task while driving. This includes reading, writing notes, eating, drinking, having an emotional conversation, etc.
- Do not reach down or behind the driver's seat, pick up items from the floor, open the glove compartment, etc.
- Do not dial or answer a call or text when driving. Instead, pull over to a safe area to make or receive a call or text.
- Plan ahead before you start your drive. Make important calls, send and read texts before you put your vehicle in drive.
- Do turn off your cell phone but put it in an unreachable spot, or activate your phone's technology to avoid calls or texts to occur while driving.

We all have choices to make when we get behind the wheel. Remember that every behavior is a choice, and when we drive, the only behavior we can control is our own. Identify your own distractions and replace them with safe, responsible, focused driving habits. Everyone on the roadway will benefit!