

Distracted Driving – Fact Sheet

Excerpted from “**Distracted Driving: A Bicycling Advocate’s Resource**” found online at www.bikeleague.org/resources/reports.

While there have always been many distractions on the road, new technology have given drivers many more distractions than ever. Research shows that using a cell phone while driving can be as risky as driving drunk. However, unlike drunk driving, a distracted driver consciously and soberly decides not to pay attention to the road. Drunk driving was once considered publically acceptable until advocates fought to change laws and attitudes. Distracted driving must be addressed with the same level of attention. According to the National Conference of State Legislators in 2009, 209 distracted driving bills were considered in 45 states, up from 133 bills in 33 states in 2008.ⁱ

Crash risks and injuries

- A study by National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute (VTTI,) found that driver inattention led to eight out of 10 of all crashes and 65 percent of all near-crashes.ⁱⁱ
- In 2008, driver distraction led to at least 5,870 fatalities, 16 percent of all fatal crashes.ⁱⁱⁱ These numbers rely on police reports, likely underestimating the actual numbers.
- In 2006, researchers at the University of Utah confirmed an earlier finding and concluded “the impairments associated with using a cell phone while driving can be as profound as those associated with driving while drunk.”^{iv} No difference was found between hand-held and hands-free phones.
- A study by VTTI that found professional truck drivers who sent text messages while driving are *23 times* more likely to crash or nearly crash.^v

Recommendations for effective, enforceable distracted driving legislation

1. Ban all distracted driving!
2. Distracted driving, cell phone *bans and texting bans* should be *primary enforcement* laws. Primary enforcement means an officer can ticket the offender without another violation having occurred.
3. NHTSA must give distracted driving as much priority as it gives its drunken driving and seatbelt campaigns, by advocating for: strong legislation; public-private partnerships at the local, state and federal levels; active, high-visibility enforcement, and effective public education.
4. The income from all fines for distracted driving should be put towards outreach campaigns and targeted traffic enforcement for the safety of all road users. Fines in school zones should be doubled and the money should go to a School Zone Safety Fund to support Safe Routes to Schools and infrastructure upgrades to increase safety for children.

State laws

States have passed different types of laws to decrease driving distractions. For a complete list of cell phone laws in each state visit the Governors Highway Safety Association's website. As of February 2010, the following laws were in place:

- **Distracted Driving.** It is against the law to drive while distracted in Maine and New Hampshire. Utah considers speaking on a cell phone to be an offense only if a driver is also committing some other moving violation (other than speeding).
- **Hand-held cell phones.** In California, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York and Oregon (as well as the District of Columbia and the Virgin Islands) talking on a hand-held phone is a primary offence. Drivers may be ticketed without committing another violation. In Washington State it is considered a secondary offense; a driver must be committing another violation to be penalized.
- **All cell phone use.** No state currently bans absolutely all cell phone use for all drivers. Many states, however, ban all cell phone use for certain groups. Twenty-one states (and the District of Columbia) ban all cell use by **novice drivers**. Seventeen states (and the District of Columbia) prohibit **school bus drivers** with passengers present from all cell phone use.
- **Text messaging.** Nineteen states and the District of Columbia now ban text messaging for all drivers. Nine states prohibit text messaging by *novice drivers*. Texas *prohibits school bus drivers* with passengers present from texting while driving.
- **Special cases:** Illinois bans the use of cell phones while driving in a school zone or in a highway construction zone. Texas has banned the use of hand-held phones and texting in school crossing zones. In Michigan, teens with probationary licenses whose cell phone usage contributes to a traffic crash or ticket may not use a cell phone while driving.

Find the full version of this report at www.bikeleague.org/resources/reports.

For more information and sources, contact Darren Flusche at the League of American Bicyclists at Darren@bikeleague.org.

ⁱ National Conference of State Legislators <<http://www.ncsl.org/?tabid=13599>>

ⁱⁱ Klauer, et al. (2006). The Impact of Driver Inattention on Near-Crash/Crash Risk: An Analysis Using the 100-Car Naturalistic Driving Study Data, NHTSA Technical Report

ⁱⁱⁱ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (2009). An Examination of Driver Distraction as Recorded in NHTSA Databases. NHTSA Traffic Safety Facts.

^{iv} Redelmeier & Tibshirani (1997). Association between cellular telephone calls and motor vehicle collisions. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 336; 453-458.

Strayer, Drews, Crouch (2006). Department of Psychology, University of Utah. PROCEEDINGS of the Second International Driving Symposium on Human Factors in Driver Assessment, Training and Vehicle Design.

^v Olson, Hanowski, Hickman, & Bocanegra (2009). Driver Distraction in Commercial Vehicle Operations. VTTI