

Managing Your Risk – Driver Distraction

41,059 people were killed in 2007 in road crashes. 12% involved large trucks. 9% were attributed to driver inattention according to the FMCSA; Large Truck Crash Causation Study (LTCCS).

Driver distraction or inattention comes in many forms. Each involves an activity that takes a driver's attention away from the concentration of the task of driving.

This study reveals odds ratios of the top 7 tasks that involve this risk.

<u>Tasks</u>	<u>Odds ratio</u>
Text message on cell phone	23.24
Cleaning side mirror, reaching for item in cab	10.07
Interact with/look at dispatch device	9.93
Write on pad, notebook, etc	8.98
Use calculator	8.21
Look at map	7.02
Dial cell phone	5.93

If you dial or text on a cell phone you are over 29 times more likely to be involved in an accident than those not using a cell phone while driving. This data is mostly incomplete and very conservative as many drivers do not admit to such distractions while being interviewed during a post accident investigation. Cell phone use while driving has been compared to the equivalent of a 0.06 blood alcohol concentration (B.A.C.) relative to distracting drivers.

The use of cell phones, while driving involves the highest risk of driver distraction. 33 states have implemented some sort of law restricting the use of cell phones to date. The Federal Government is reviewing a national ban on cell phone use while driving. The DOT has recently **banned texting-while-driving by commercial truck and bus drivers**. President Obama has also recently banned federal employees from text messaging when they are behind the wheel of government vehicles and from texting in their own cars if they use government-issued phones or are on official business just days after hearing the report from the Distracted Driver Conference hosted by the U.S. Transportation Department last September. We all know that most drivers will still not stop using cell phones while driving because of legislation. Our culture is so accustomed to instant communication and contact with the rest of the world; it will take much more than laws to change our habits.

You might be old enough to remember the beginnings of seatbelt laws that were mandated back in 1984. Automobile manufacturers began to equip cars with light and sound alarms to remind drivers to fasten seatbelts. Laws do not necessarily create a change in personal behavior inasmuch as speed laws don't prevent people from speeding.

In my humble opinion, to reduce these risks you need a personal behavior change. This type of change comes from 2 major areas. Either a new personal awareness is developed from specific subject education, or a tragic life changing experience of a loved one or self. Personally, I choose the awareness/education form. I'm also not a fan of more government regulation but in the case of saving lives, it might be a practical approach but still not the only solution.

Companies and drivers should review various state cell phone laws, company policies regarding such risk and legal liabilities. You should contact your insurance broker for more detailed information regarding state cell phone laws and sample company safety policy statements as well as additional educational safety material.

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