Fact Sheet

What Is Distracted Driving?

A 2009 study by Virginia Tech Transportation Institute on the subject of distracted driving found that text messaging increased the risk of a safety-critical event, such as a crash or near-crash, by 23 times over a driver who wasn’t distracted. This compelling statistic caught the attention of the public at large, legislatures and even phone companies and since 2009, 39 states and the District of Columbia have banned texting while driving.

In 2013, a new Institute study reinforced the dangers of distracted driving—and it didn’t just include texting. Included in its findings: Engaging in visual-manual cell phone subtasks such as reaching for a phone, dialing and texting greatly increases drivers’ risks.

In fact, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), driving a vehicle while texting is six times more dangerous than driving while intoxicated.

Distracted driving is any activity that could divert a person’s attention away from the primary task of driving. All distractions endanger driver, passenger, and bystander safety. These types of distractions include:

- Texting takes your eyes off the road for 4.6 seconds. At 55 MPH, that’s like driving an entire football field blindfolded.
- Cell phone use was reported in 18% of distraction-related fatalities in America.
- 11% of all drivers under the age of 20 involved in fatal crashes were reported as distracted at the time of the crash. This age group has the largest proportion of drivers who were distracted.
- For drivers 15-19 years old involved in fatal crashes, 21 percent of the distracted drivers were distracted by the use of cell phones.
- A quarter of teens respond to a text message once or more every time they drive. 20 percent of teens and 10 percent of parents admit that they have extended, multi-message text conversations while driving.

Sources: Virginia Tech Transportation Institute, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration “One Text Or Call Could Wreck It All.”