

Distracted driving

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The risk of being distracted while driving has been present as long as there have been vehicles on the road. Broadly, distraction is considered to be any activity that takes hands off the wheel of the vehicle, draws eyes away from the road or simply takes the mind off the task of driving.

"Rubbernecking," adjusting the radio, talking to passengers, eating, drinking, using a mobile phone and reading are all forms of distraction that can hinder a driver. With more and more amenities available on mobile devices and in vehicles themselves, it seems that the distractions to drivers are endless.

In a study released in March 2015, researchers from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety analyzed almost 1,700 crash videos provided by in-vehicle recording systems. They concluded that distractions were involved in nearly 6 out of 10 moderate-to-severe crashes involving teens – a rate 4 times higher than police reports suggest. While this study focused on teen drivers, the insights it provides can be applied to drivers of all ages.¹

Researchers found the most common types of distractions that preceded crashes were:

- Interacting with passenger(s): 15 percent
- Cell phone: 12 percent
- Focusing on something inside the vehicle: 10 percent
- Focusing on something outside the vehicle: 9 percent
- Singing or moving to music: 8 percent
- Grooming: 6 percent
- Reaching for something: 6 percent

Mitigating Distraction

Zurich recommends implementing the following procedures personally and among your employees to help reduce the risk of vehicle accidents caused by distracted driving.

Plan calls

Establish times during the day when the driver can pull off the road and be available for communications (whether text, email or telephone). Work out the frequency and times, based on expected needs and the job being done.

Ignore the phone

Calls cannot always be scheduled. Establish a culture where allowing callers to leave messages to be returned at the earliest convenience (i.e., when it is safe to do so) is acceptable.

Drive defensively

Defensive driving techniques provide more time to respond to changing driving conditions.

- Pre-set temperature and radio controls.
- Clear windows of frost, ice, snow or debris before driving.
- Increase following distance. (Zurich recommends at least four seconds in normal conditions in a sedan and longer in larger vehicles or adverse conditions.)
- Understand what is occurring ahead of the vehicle. (Zurich recommends scanning at least ten seconds ahead.)
- Drive for conditions. In inclement weather, slow down and allow for increased stopping distances and poor visibility.
- Deal with distractions in a safe location, while parked.

Understanding the risk of distracted driving and deciding to take precautionary measures to minimize distractions may help you and your employees avoid vehicle damage, serious injury or even death.

¹ "Using Naturalistic Driving Data to Assess the Prevalence of Environmental Factors and Driver Behaviors in Teen Driver Crashes." AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, March 2015

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