Distractions Derail Safety

What's a Stake?

The ever-increasing use of smartphones finds most of with our heads down staring into the glow of text messages, games, tweets, twitters, selfies and more. One of the downsides to this obsession is that people mistakenly think they can perform their jobs safely while they use these devices.

What's the Danger?

Whether a worker is text-messaging someone while driving or listening to music through their headphones while working, he or she is dangerously distracted and at risk for causing injury to his or herself and others. We are inundated by information and it's left many of us unable to focus and be present in what we are doing. This loss of focus at work, in your vehicle, and even while walking (head down not watching where you are going) can be deadly.

Many people brag that they could do their jobs in their sleep or they're good at multi-tasking, but the reality is our brains can't fully and safely do two or more things at once. It's tempting to think you're different and able to handle it, but to put it bluntly – you're not.

EXAMPLE

A commuter train engineer who was sending and receiving multiple text messages while operating a train failed to notice a red signal and crashed the crowded train into a freight train, killing 25 people. He had sent a text message just 22 seconds before the trains collided.

In addition to the dangers, psychologist Larry Rosen points out that every time you stop to check your phone it takes roughly 20 minutes to get back to what you were working on. Your brain then

must reactivate all the areas you were using. Projects end up taking longer and the constant interruptions cause more stress and anxiety.

How to Protect Yourself

Here are some ways to keep you and those around you safe.

- Turn off or put your phone and other devices in the trunk, glove compartment or the backseat so you won't be tempted to use it or check it if a text or call comes in. Let people you regularly communicate with that you aren't going to use your phone while driving – period.
- Texting while behind the wheel is more dangerous because your eyes are off the road for several seconds and your hand or hands are off the steering wheel!
- While you are texting or talking (even hands free) you can travel the length of a football field and have no idea what's going on beyond the device in your hand.
- Wearing earbuds and listening to music at work should be saved for break time or your time off.
    - Not only can you damage your hearing, you're likely tuning out everything else around you.
    - Depending on how loud it is, it's also possible you won't hear warning sounds, such as back-up alarms on forklifts, fire alarms, instructions, or warning shouts from co-workers.

Final Word

Many work places now have policies regarding the use of cell phones and other devices. Ask your supervisor if your workplace has such a policy. Even if a policy isn't in place, it's up to you to use these devices responsibly. A freeway is no place for texting and a busy shop floor is not the place to zone out to music when you need to be paying attention to your job and your personal safety.