Driven to Distraction – The Dangers of Distracted Driving

What's at Stake?

Distracted driving is a factor in approximately four million crashes in North America each year. The Canadian and American Automobile Associations (CAA and AAA) have identified the following deadly driving distractors:

1. Cell phones
2. Objects, people and events outside of the vehicle
3. Adjusting radio and vehicle controls
4. Vehicle occupants
5. Something moving in the car
6. Using another object or device
7. Eating and drinking

What's the Danger?

Driving requires us to **See, Hear, Do**, and **Think**. The seven distractors require at least one of these skills as well. Using a cell phone to text or carry on a conversation requires you to use all four skills – **See, Hear**, Do and **Think**.

Which is why, even though all seven distractors mentioned earlier are dangerous, cell phone usage ranks at the top of the list for distracting behaviors that increase your chances of being involved in a crash or near crash event.

- Text messaging (or texting) on a cell phone – 23 times more likely
- Talking on a cell phone – 4 to 5 times more likely
- Reading – 3 times more likely
- Applying makeup – 3 times more likely
- Reaching for a moving object – 9 times more likely
- Dialing on a hand-held device – 3 times more likely
- Talking or listening on a hand-held device – 1.3 times more likely

Driving while talking or texting on a cell phone not only puts you at risk for an accident- it can also result in an expensive fine and demerit points on your driver’s licence if police catch you doing it. Many states and provinces prohibit cell phone use while driving, and many employers also have strict policies prohibiting this practice.

How to Protect Yourself

Before you start out for a drive here are five easy tips you can practice to avoid distracted driving:

1. Give yourself plenty of travel time and make sure you’re well rested and alert.
2. Review all maps and directions and pre-program your route on your vehicle’s global positioning system (GPS).
3. Stow and secure loose objects.
4. Prepare children and other passengers with everything they need. Don’t forget to secure pets too.
5. Lastly, preset the controls on your vehicle’s climate control system and audio system.

While you are driving:

1. Let calls go to voicemail and don’t read or return texts. Do not surf the Internet or read emails. If you think you’ll be tempted to check your phone, turn it off or place it in your vehicle’s glove compartment.
2. Do not eat, drink, smoke, apply makeup or engage in any other grooming activities.
3. Stop at safe locations such as rest stops or a commuter lot, to make and receive calls or take care of the needs of children, passengers or pets.
4. Keep your eyes and mind on the road.
5. Stop periodically to help you stay alert. If you are fighting the urge to sleep, consuming caffeine, opening the windows to let in fresh air and blasting music won’t keep you safe and alert. You need to find a safe place to pull over and take a nap.
6. Finally, maintain at least a two-second following distance

between your vehicle and the vehicle in front of you. Using the two-second rule significantly reduces your chances of being involved in a motor vehicle accident. Increase your following distance beyond two seconds in inclement weather, heavy traffic and while passing through highway work zones.

Final Word

Safe driving demands your undivided attention. Keep your eyes and your mind on the road. Driving and multitasking can never safely coexist. If you need to make or take a phone call, check driving directions or select some different music, pull over into a safe place. Two minutes of inconvenience seems like a more than fair trade for a few extra years or decades of life.