



Cognitive Distraction Myth Buster

Misconceptions persist about the dangers of talking on a hands-free cell phones while driving. Here are some of the most common myths:

Myth: A hands-free device eliminates the dangers of cell phone use while driving

FACT: Hands-free devices offer no safety benefits because they do not eliminate cognitive distraction. The brain cannot process two cognitively complex tasks at once and, as it switches from a cell phone conversation to driving and back again, the brain becomes so overloaded that drivers can miss seeing up to 50% of their driving environment.

Myth: If a driver's eyes are on the road at all times then he/she is safe

FACT: A driver may be looking at his or her driving environment while they are talking on a cell phone device. The problem is the driver looks but does not "see." Distracted drivers experience what researchers call inattention blindness – similar to tunnel vision. Drivers look out the window, but their brains do not process everything necessary to safely monitor their surroundings. It is because a driver talking on a cell phone is focused first on the cell phone conversation; the brain prioritizes the cognitive task of driving second.

Myth: Even if hands-free devices are dangerous, talking on a cell phone still is not the worst thing drivers can do behind the wheel

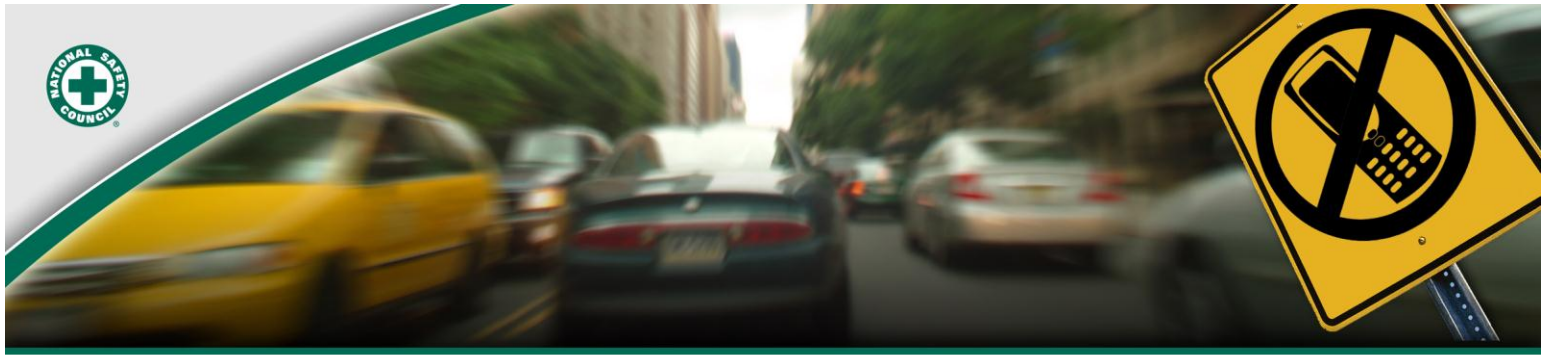
FACT: There are other activities that are more dangerous for drivers such as turning around to reach for an object in the back seat or rummaging through a purse. However, these distractions typically last just a few seconds because drivers realize the risk and the actions are short lived. Cell phone conversations often are longer because drivers do not realize they are cognitively distracted. The longer a call, the longer the exposure to risk. That is why cell phone use causes more crashes than more dangerous activities – because of the number of people engaged in the behavior at any given time.

Myth: If cell phone use while driving is cognitively distracting, then drivers also should not talk to other passengers

FACT: Some passenger conversations can be distracting to drivers such as intense conversations or arguments. But adult passengers often actively help drivers by monitoring and discussing traffic, and they tend to suppress conversation when the driving environment becomes demanding. Passengers can see the roadway; callers cannot.

Myth: Other drivers have problems talking on cell phones and driving, but I can handle it

FACT: According to a study done by the University of Utah, 98% of the public is incapable of performing two cognitively demanding tasks at once without incurring substantial costs in performance. Only 2% of people have the ability to multitask without performance problems, and they perform at an "extraordinary" level. These are the kinds of people you want as "Top Gun" pilots.



Myth: Listening to the radio is as cognitively distracting as talking on a cell phone

FACT: Listening to music is not as cognitively demanding because it is not a two-way conversation in which the brain needs to formulate a response. Listening to music does not require as much thinking.