



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

MAR 09 2012

Office of the Chairman

Dear Corporate Leader:

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is concerned about the growing number of highway crashes that involve driver distraction caused by the use of a portable electronic device (PED). Since 2002, the NTSB has investigated several accidents in which the use of a PED caused or contributed to the accident. Our investigations show that the problem is not limited only to the use of a hand-held electronic device or to one segment of the driving population. We are aware that many states have taken steps to address PED distractions by prohibiting all drivers from texting or prohibiting any cell phone use by young drivers and school bus drivers. However, the NTSB believes that such restrictions are still not sufficient to address this growing epidemic.

Epidemiological, driving simulator, and naturalistic studies all show that a driver's crash risk is higher any time he or she uses a PED; only the degree of risk is affected by how the PED is used. Equally important, the use of PEDs is skyrocketing. According to CTIA—The Wireless Association,¹ 10 years ago, approximately 40 percent of the U.S. population, or 120 million people, subscribed to wireless service. Today, there are more than 320 million wireless connections—more than one for every man, woman, and child in the country.

Recognizing the need for drivers to focus on the driving task, in December 2011, the NTSB recommended that all 50 states and the District of Columbia ban the nonemergency use of all PEDs by all drivers.

There is no doubt that the adoption of “PED-free,” safe driving behavior will require a cultural shift. If we are to bring about change—like the widespread shift to the use of seat belts, child restraints, and curbing drunk and drugged driving—it will take time and commitment.

Our recommendation focuses on state bans, but everyone including organizations, families, and individuals all play a critical role in changing societal norms. According to the National Safety Council, many Fortune 500 companies and other companies with large vehicle fleets have already instituted safety policies prohibiting PED use behind the wheel to protect their employees. Surveys conducted by the National Safety Council in 2009 and 2010 determined that organizations can lead the charge without adversely impacting the bottom line or productivity. As expected, strong company cell phone policies translate into strong safety performance; preliminary information indicates that full bans may lead to decreased accident rates. In 2009, the NTSB adopted a policy restricting the use of PEDs by NTSB staff. When a driver gets behind the wheel, the driver needs to connect to the immediate task at hand – driving

¹ See <http://www.ctia.org/advocacy/research/index.cfm/AID/10323>.

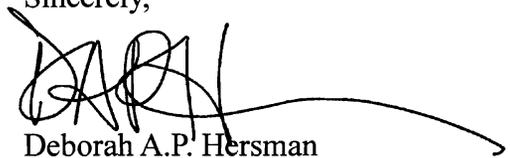
safely and attentively – and disconnect from the phone and the internet. No call, no text, no update is worth risking one's life.

The NTSB recognizes that other distractions exist. PED use, however, is of particular concern, both because of the findings of our accident investigations and because drivers use these devices for longer periods of time compared with other distracting activities. Every minute that a driver uses a PED increases his or her chances of causing an accident that might have been avoided. With more and more drivers using PEDs instead of focusing on driving safely, everyone on the road is at risk.

We are pleased that the National Safety Council has developed the Corporate Cell Phone Policy Kit, which encourages total bans on the use of cell phones and other PEDs, and we appreciate the opportunity to include our letter reinforcing this message. We hope you will give serious consideration to adopting a similar organizational policy to ensure the safety of your employees and others on the road.

Thank you for your interest in transportation safety and for your leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'DAPH', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Deborah A.P. Hersman
Chairman