



Making our World Safer®

The Growing Epidemic of Cell Phone Use While Driving

Participant Guide

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Visit distracteddriving.nsc.org for the latest material and updated content for the Cell Phone Policy Kit.

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Course Overview

About This Course

Purpose

The Growing Epidemic of Cell Phone Use While Driving introduces the concept and highlights the dangers of distracted driving. During this course, you will learn about the distractions that occur when driving, have an opportunity to assess your driving style and discuss safety tips to reduce the risks of distracted driving.

Objectives

Upon completion of this course, you should be able to:

- Define the term “distracted”
- Understand the risk of using cell phones while driving
- Identify tips to prevent distracted driving
- Explain why using a cell phone (handheld and hands-free) while driving is a distraction
- Know the laws regarding cell phone use and text messaging in your state and other states where you drive

What is Distracted Driving?

Definition

dis·tract·ed (dī-strāk' tīd), adjective

1. Having the attention diverted
2. Rendered incapable of behaving, reacting, etc., in a normal manner

To put it another way, a distraction is anything that:

- Takes your eyes off the road – a visual distraction
- Takes your mind off the road – a cognitive distraction
- Takes your hands off the wheel – a manual distraction

Driving is a risky activity. Each year, more than 35,000 people are killed in motor vehicle crashes and more than 2 million are injured.

What distracts us?

Think about the number of things we do in our cars that take our attention away from the primary task of driving:

- Passenger-related
- Vehicle-related
- Wireless devices
- Eating
- Smoking
- Daydreaming
- Looking at distractions outside the vehicle
- Personal hygiene

How does distraction affect us?

What may surprise you is how much taking our attention away from the primary task of driving affects our driving ability and crash risk:

- Increases the risk of rear-end collisions
- Slows reaction time
- Increases the chances of missing traffic signals, signs and exits
- Allows for looking but not seeing
- Increases traffic violations
- Makes drivers **four times** as likely to be in a crash involving injury

True or False?

Distracted driving is a form of aggressive driving.

Self Assessment

Use the following scale to choose the answer that best applies to you for each of the following questions:

1 Always 2 Frequently 3 Usually 4 Sometimes 5 Never

When driving, how often do you ...

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Take your eyes off the road while talking to passengers?	1	2	3	4	5
2. Adjust vehicle climate or radio controls?	1	2	3	4	5
3. Eat or drink?	1	2	3	4	5
4. Talk on a cell phone?	1	2	3	4	5
5. Tend to children?	1	2	3	4	5
6. Read directions, a map or a publication?	1	2	3	4	5
7. Groom yourself—comb your hair, shave, apply make-up, brush or floss your teeth?	1	2	3	4	5
8. Enjoy the sights or take in the scenery?	1	2	3	4	5
9. Send or read text messages?	1	2	3	4	5
10. Use a mobile electronic device to check your email or surf the Internet?	1	2	3	4	5

Total Score: _____

Interpreting Your Score

If your total score is...	Then you are a...	
46 to 50	Focused Driver	You consider others when you drive. You consciously drive to be safe and keep others safe. <hr/>
36 to 45	Common Driver	A little more focus on safety and total control of your vehicle could help you and other drivers. <hr/>
26 to 35	Risky Driver	You multitask while driving. You are distracted and at risk for mistakes while driving in this manner. <hr/>
25 or lower	Hazardous Driver	Your driving is placing you, your passengers, other drivers and pedestrians at risk.

Safety Tips to Avoid Distracted Driving

Driving requires your full attention. You must constantly scan the roadway ahead for situations that may require quick action.

Lower Crash Risk **Before You Drive**

- Be familiar with the controls in your vehicle, especially when you are borrowing someone else's vehicle or driving a rental
- Adjust vehicle controls such as mirrors, seat, radio, heat or air conditioning
- Plan ahead. Read maps and check traffic conditions.
- Secure your pet properly in a carrier or safety belt harness
- Program directions into your navigation system and enable the voice-activated function

Lower Crash Risk While You Drive

- Do not make or answer calls on hands-free or handheld phones
- If you must call 911, pull off the road to a safe area
- Do not send or read text messages or emails
- Do not multitask—read, write notes, eat or drink
- Do not program addresses in a navigation system
- Pull over to a safe area to care for children
- Do not reach down or behind your seat, pick up items from the floor, open the glove box or clean the inside windows
- Avoid emotional conversations with passengers
- Do not drive with your knees or feet

Take Responsibility

- You are the only person who can control your behavior behind the wheel
- Every driving decision you make has consequences
- The consequences of a poor driving decision can range from a traffic violation to a costly crash, a life-changing injury or even a fatality

Frequently Asked Questions

Question

Does cell phone use while driving play a role in traffic crashes?

Answer

Research shows a driver is four times as likely to be involved in a crash resulting in property damage or injury while talking on a cell phone. Crash rates for teen drivers are much higher because teens are the most inexperienced drivers, the group most likely to use a cell phone and the group most likely to text message while driving.

Question

Is it safe to use a hands-free cell phone (headset, speakerphone or other device) while driving?

Answer

Hands-free phones are not risk-free. Studies show hands-free cell phones distract drivers to the same extent as handheld phones. Why? Because it is the conversation – not the device – that distracts the driver. Research shows that when using either a hands-free or handheld cell phone, the distraction is significant enough to decrease a driver's performance. This can cause a driver to miss key visual and audio cues needed to avoid a crash.

Question

Is talking on a cell phone any worse than having a conversation with a passenger in the car?

Answer

Any activity a driver engages in distracts him or her from the primary task of driving. Some research findings comparing cell phone use to passenger conversations show cell phone use can be more risky. A significant difference between the two is the fact that a passenger can monitor the driving situation along with the driver and pause for, or alert the driver to, potential hazards. A person on the other end of the phone conversation is unaware of the roadway situation. Passengers riding with adult drivers actually decrease crash risk. (Note that this is not true for novice teen drivers – passengers significantly increase the crash risk of teen drivers.)

Question

In an emergency, should I use my cell phone while driving?

Answer

An emergency call cannot be handled properly while you are driving. Pull over and park in a safe place to take or make an emergency call. It is safer and easier to write notes and respond properly when you are parked.

Question

What do studies say about the risk of cell phone use compared to other activities such as eating or drinking?

Answer

The relative risk, frequency and duration of cell phone use and text messaging make them much more likely to lead to a crash or near-crash. While there are a few higher risk activities – such as retrieving something from the back seat, reading or eating – these activities occur much less frequently and for shorter lengths of time than cell phone conversations and text messaging.

Distracted Driving Assumptions to Challenge

- Assumption #1 "The genie is out of the bottle." Potentially distracting devices have invaded the driver's domain so pervasively that attempts to control them now are impossible or ill-advised.
- Response *This problem will grow larger and more complex. Waiting to control it only increases the difficulty we will have solving it.*
- Assumption #2: Eating fast food, applying cosmetics and other in-car distractions also present risks. Why are we not worrying about them?
- Response *We have work to do on all forms of driver distraction. However, we should not accept one risk because we have yet to address another or because we have accepted a particular risk. As mentioned previously, drivers engage in cell phone conversations more frequently and for longer lengths of time than these other distractions, so the risks involving cell phone use is greater.*
- Assumption #3: Hands-free equipment lessens or eliminates driver distraction.
- Response *Hands-free devices are not risk free. More than 30 research studies clearly show we must be concerned about manual distraction, visual distraction **and cognitive distraction**. Hands-free devices, depending on the equipment, may reduce manual and visual distraction—but they still involve cognitive distraction from conversation.*

Assumption #4: Existing laws are adequate to deter drivers from the inappropriate use of distracting devices.

Response *Existing laws are not necessarily adequate to eliminate crash risk from cell phones or other mobile electronic devices. This is because no laws ban the use of hands-free devices, thus do not eliminate cognitive distraction.*

Assumption #5: Cell phones and other devices contribute to highway safety because they allow people to notify law enforcement and emergency services immediately, reducing response time. They also allow you to provide directions to drivers who may be lost or unfamiliar with an area.

Response *While these benefits are certainly real, they in no way reduce the risks from a driver's use of a cell phone in a moving vehicle, which is the threat we are addressing here.*

State Cell Phone Driving Laws Summary

Law of My State
and Surrounding
States

Your instructor may share your state law. If your state law is not provided, you can easily look up the laws of your state and surrounding states at:

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety:
www.iihs.org/laws/cellphonelaws.aspx

The Governors Highway Safety Association:
www.ghsa.org/html/stateinfo/laws/cellphone_laws.html

Laws are being passed nationwide each month and are changing fast. The websites listed above have current information.

Cell Phones

Current law in my state and nearby states:

Text Messaging

Current law in my state and nearby states:

Novice Teen Drivers

Current law in my state and nearby states:

School Bus Drivers

Current law in my state and nearby states:

Course Summary

In this course, you learned about the concept of distracted driving and the dangers of cell phone use while driving. You reviewed the types of distractions we encounter daily that interfere with the task of driving and put everyone on the road at risk. In addition, you assessed your own driving style and reviewed safety tips to prevent distracted driving.

Now that you have completed this course, you should be able to:

- Define the term “distracted.”
- Understand the risk of using cell phones while driving.
- Identify tips to prevent distracted driving.
- Explain why using a cell phone (handheld and hands-free) while driving is a distraction.
- Know the laws of your state and surrounding states, regarding cell phone use and text messaging.