



Cognitive Distraction The Facts

1

COGNITIVE DISTRACTION

We might think the brain “multi-tasks” but the brain actually does not process two cognitively-demanding tasks at once. Instead, the brain switches back and forth between two tasks. When a driver is talking on a cell phone, his or her brain “toggles” between the cell phone conversation and the task of driving. The brain prioritizes the conversation and the drive can actually become secondary.

2

LOOKING BUT NOT SEEING

A cell phone distracted driver may be “looking” and still miss “seeing” half of the roadway environment around the car. Distracted drivers experience what researchers call inattention blindness – similar to tunnel vision. Drivers look out the windshield, but their brains do not process everything necessary to drive safely. For example, cell phone distracted drivers might look directly at a red light, but not process the need to stop.

3

WE CANNOT REACT QUICKLY ENOUGH

Research shows talking on a cell phone significantly reduces a driver’s reaction time. This delayed reaction time is a direct result of the brain switching its focus back and forth between two tasks. The brain may need only a fraction of a second to switch tasks, but sometimes drivers only have a fraction of a second to react to a hazard.

Cell phone distracted drivers actually have **slower reaction times than some drivers who have been drinking**. One study from the University of Utah actually found drivers talking on cell phones were slower to hit the brakes than drivers who were legally drunk with .08 BAC.

A false sense of security

Drivers who switch to hands-free devices likely believed they were making a safer choice. No driver starts a cell phone call with the intention of injuring or killing another person or themselves. However, hands-free devices cannot save someone from becoming a statistic.

Pledge to drive cell free at
nsc.org/handsfree.



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