



The public strongly supports legislation to curb distracted driving, according to 20 public opinion surveys from 2001 – 2009 compiled by the National Safety Council. The surveys looked at behavior, attitudes about risk and support for legislation banning driver activities, such as talking on a cell phone.

The surveys are from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety (AAAFTS), Harris Interactive, Liberty Mutual Group, Nationwide Insurance, New York Times/CBS, Pew Research Center and Quinnipiac University Polling Institute.

The survey results are summarized below.

Legislative Support Summary

- Current public support for laws banning texting is very high at 80 to 97 percent, according to three surveys conducted in 2009 by Nationwide Insurance, New York Times/CBS and Quinnipiac University.
- Public support for laws banning handheld phones has been consistently high since 2001, with support levels of 73 to 86 percent. Most polls report at least 80 percent support, according to 10 national and state public opinion polls conducted from 2001-2009.
- Nearly 43 percent of the public supports a total cell phone ban, which includes banning handheld, hands-free and texting, according to the AAAFTS in 2009.
- Nationwide Insurance's 2009 survey found 57 percent of respondents strongly or somewhat support total bans on cell phone use while driving, including banning hands-free.
- The public is quickly understanding the risks of texting while driving. According to a 2009 AAAFTS survey, 95 percent of respondents rated texting while driving as completely or somewhat unacceptable and 87 percent said texting or e-mailing while driving is a very serious threat to safety.
- Public support for legislation banning texting and/or e-mailing while driving is very high, ranging 80 to 97 percent (Nationwide, New York Times/CBS and Quinnipiac).

Risk Perception

- National and state surveys since 2001 show the majority of voters believe laws banning cell phone use while driving would increase safety.
- Public risk perception has in recent years shifted from "slightly or not dangerous" to "very dangerous." Surveys in 2009 showed 71 percent of the public rated talking while driving on a handheld phone as "unacceptable" (AAAFTS). And 64 percent agreed talking on cell phones while driving is "dangerous" or "very dangerous" (Harris).
- In recent years, the public is rating cell phone use as more serious than other driver distractions (Nationwide).
- Despite public belief in the danger, nearly three out of 10 participants in a 2009 AAAFTS survey admitted to talking on a cell phone while driving fairly often or regularly in the preceding 30 days.

Handheld vs. Hands-Free

- The following has remained consistently high throughout the decade:
 - Support for legislation banning handheld phones
 - Belief that banning handheld phones will increase safety
 - Belief that talking on handheld phones while driving is a threat

- Public risk perception has been lower for hands-free devices than handheld phones, but support is growing for bans on both, according to recent findings of several organizations.
- Public knowledge and opinion about the risk associated with hands-free phone conversations do not yet reflect scientific evidence. In December 2009, NSC compiled 30 studies that compared talking on handheld and hands-free phones while driving. The studies found no increase in safety from using hands-free phones.

Texting

- According to CTIA-The Wireless Association, the recent increase in text messages sent per minute is dramatic:
 - 2000 -- 319
 - 2005 -- 223,595
 - 2007 -- 1,095,163
 - 2008 -- 2,509,750
- Despite majority public belief that texting is a serious threat to safety, the percentage of teens and adult drivers who report texting while driving is shown in multiple polls to be increasing (Nationwide, AAFTS, Harris and Pew Research Center).

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