

Understanding Driver Distraction

Distracted driving can be deadly. Below is a list of common distracted driving issues, with recommendations for how to address them. For more information on this topic, visit nsc.org/justdrive.

- ISSUE:** **Drivers do not take distraction seriously enough**
- RECOMMENDATIONS:** Know the numbers. More than 3,100 people in the U.S. died in distraction-related crashes in 2019 alone – that’s at least eight people every day. That same year, 287,000 people were injured in distraction-related crashes.
- Drivers should be aware of three major types of distraction: visual (eyes), manual (hands) and cognitive (mind). Most people recognize when they are visually and/or manually distracted and seek to disengage from those activities as quickly as possible. People typically do not realize when they are cognitively distracted, such as when using a cell phone. When your eyes, hands and mind are not focused on driving, you increase the chance that you will make mistakes that can result in injuries or even death.
- Show your concern for safety. Employers can demonstrate to employees that they take safety seriously by having a safe driving policy that addresses distracted driving.
- ISSUE:** **Hands-free is not risk-free**
- RECOMMENDATION:** Hands-free devices and voice command systems create a cognitive distraction as the driver mentally engages with interactive tasks. While hands-free options may be marginally safer than handheld devices, eliminating driver use of all types of cell phones and in-vehicle infotainment systems is safest.
- ISSUE:** **Drivers think cell phone use is distracting ... for other people**
- RECOMMENDATION:** Although 87% of people think talking on a cell phone while driving is a serious safety threat, 49% have talked on a handheld phone while driving. Drivers should talk the talk AND walk the walk, refraining from using their phone when behind the wheel.
- ISSUE:** **It is impossible to multitask and give equal attention to each task**
- RECOMMENDATION:** People often think they are effectively accomplishing two tasks at the same time. It is possible to complete a phone conversation while driving and arrive at the destination without incident, but it is a misconception that the tasks can be done simultaneously and as safely as possible. Motorists should make driving the primary focus and perform other cognitively demanding tasks only when safely parked.