Before reading the article, answer the following questions:

1. Do you text and drive? Why or why not?

2. Do you talk on the phone and drive? Why or why not?

While reading, do the following:

1. Highlight or underline words, phrases, or sentences that you think are important. In the right margins, write your reactions.

2. Write words or phrases that summarize each paragraph in the left margins.

3. Pose questions in the margins to express difference of opinion or put a question mark

next to any part you don’t understand.

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**Cell Phone Use and Texting Account for Many Traffic Fatalities**

By Scott Mayerowitz

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While traffic fatalities have not increased in recent years, many traffic accidents are caused by distracted drivers. Studies show that drivers overestimate their abilities and assume that they can ignore texting bans and other restrictions. This behavior leads to dangerous situations and often results in avoidable crashes.

Think chatting on your cell phone or sending a text message while driving isn't that dangerous? Think again.

So-called distracted driving crashes claimed 5,474 lives and led to 448,000 injuries across the country last year, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration [NHTSA]. That's one in every six highway deaths.

"People [need to] take personal responsibility for the fact that they're driving a three or four thousand pound car," Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood told ABC News. "If you're looking down at a cell phone for four seconds or a texting device for four seconds, you're driving the length of a football field without looking at the road."

**It Takes Time**

Overall traffic fatalities fell in 2009 to their lowest levels since 1950. But as drivers make smarter decisions about wearing seatbelts and not drinking and driving, they are reaching for their cell phones more and more. From 2005 to 2009, the proportion of deaths tied to driver distraction increased to 16 percent from 10 percent, the government said.

"We're right at the starting gate here in terms of where the country was at when nobody buckled up and now 85 percent of the people buckle up," LaHood said. "It took 10 years to get that."

Those under the age of 20 were most likely to be distracted behind the wheel, according to the NHTSA report. However, those ages 30 to 39 were the most likely to be using a cell phone.

"It is very concerning and it's concerning to the extent that most young people think they're invincible," LaHood said. "You need to put the cell phone and the Blackberry in the glove compartment right after you buckle up."

Overall traffic fatalities fell in 2009 to their lowest levels since 1950.

**National Distracted Driving Summit**

To help raise awareness of the issue, tomorrow [Sept. 21, 2010] LaHood will convene a second National Distracted Driving Summit in Washington that will bring together transportation officials, safety advocates, law enforcement, industry representatives, researchers and family members of victims of distraction-related crashes.

LaHood said that America needs to get tough and start penalizing drivers who text. He said drunk driving deaths didn't go down until the police started arresting people and drivers lost their licenses.

At the same time, there might be a technological solution. LaHood has been speaking with companies about creating a cell phone with a chip in it or a chip in the car that disables the cell phone when the owner is in the driver's seat.

Distracted driving accidents can happen in an instant. On Jan. 3, 2008, Heather Hurd and her fiancé were on the way to meet with her parents, Russell and Kim Hurd and their wedding planner in Orlando, Fla., when a tractor-trailer driver hit their car—and eight others—while they were stopped at a traffic light.

The truck driver, who was texting with his company at the time of the crash, never applied his brakes and hit the cars at 65 mph.

Heather died at the scene.

"He didn't set out that morning to kill anyone. He was doing his job and part off his job was staying in touch with his company," said Russell Hurd. "He made some poor choices. He was just doing his job, trying to make a living. He's somebody's dad, somebody's grandfather."

In memory of their daughter, the Hurds successfully lobbied for the passage of "Heather's Law" in 2009, which prohibits drivers in their home state of Maryland from texting behind the wheel. They are working to get similar legislation passed in Florida.

The truck driver, who was texting with his company at the time of the crash, never applied his brakes and hit the cars at 65 mph.

"We're really trying to change a culture in the United States. Laws alone don't necessarily stop distracted driving," Hurd said. "We're not that naïve to think that just because there's a law that everything's going to stop."

"We want you to turn your cell phone off because we're living proof that in three or four seconds your entire life can change," he added.

**Highway Safety, Cell Phones, and Texting**

Anne McCartt, senior vice president for research with the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, said that most drivers probably know that texting or talking on a phone isn't safe.

"So simply reminding them that that's an unsafe thing to do is probably not enough to change their behavior," McCartt said. "When we look at states that have enacted laws limiting phone use, many drivers still persist in talking on phones and texting. Those laws can be very difficult to enforce."

McCartt said most drivers believe that they tend to be safer than other drivers on the road.

"Surveys show that a large majority of drivers think they're better than average drivers so it, people may believe that they can text or talk on a phone safely while other people on the road can't," she said. "With any kind of unsafe driving—drinking and driving, speeding, not wearing your seatbelt—you may get away with that most of the time. You don't think you're going to be in a crash. So it's hard to keep the worry about being in a crash foremost in your mind."

**AWL Vocabulary**

Assume device overall ignore