

# Driving While Distracted: Statistics To Know

Nationwide.com

## Learn about the risks of driving while distracted with texting while driving statistics from Nationwide

Learn about the danger of driving while distracted (DWD) and cell phone use while driving with helpful information from Nationwide Insurance to help prevent driving while texting accidents when you're behind the wheel.

A new *On Your Side*® survey by Nationwide verifies with concrete cell phone driving statistics the general assumption that there is strong public support for legislation to restrict cell phone usage while driving.

The results of the new survey show there are varying degrees of support for different types of restrictions based on these texting while driving statistics.

- 8 in 10 drivers support some type of cell phone usage restriction.
  - The majority of respondents say they are supportive of laws restricting any type of cell phone use while driving.
  - 80 percent respondents support a ban on text messaging while driving.
  - 80 percent of respondents support a ban on e-mailing while driving.
  - Two thirds (67 percent) of respondents say they are supportive of laws restricting phone calls while driving.
- Of those who supported enacting some type of cell phone usage restriction, nearly 3 in 4 believed the law should apply to all drivers, not just specific groups.

## Read other cell phone driving statistics

- Distraction from cell phone use while driving (hand held or hands free) extends a driver's reaction as much as having a blood alcohol concentration at the legal limit of **.08 percent**. (University of Utah)
- The **No.1** source of driver inattention is use of a wireless device. (Virginia Tech/NHTSA)
- Drivers that use cell phones are **four times** as likely to get into crashes serious enough to injure themselves. (NHTSA, Insurance Institute for Highway Safety)
- **10 percent** of drivers aged 16 to 24 years old are on their phone at any one time.
- Driving while distracted is a factor in **25 percent** of police reported crashes.
- Driving while using a cell phone reduces the amount of brain activity associated with driving by **37 percent** (Carnegie Mellon)

## Driving Safety Tips

### 1. Stay focused on defensive driving

- Keep 100% of your attention on driving at all times.
- Use defensive driving techniques – be aware of what others around you are doing and expect the unexpected.
- Don't use a cell phone or any other electronic device while driving.

### 2. Practice safe driving tips

- Build time into your trip schedule to stop for food, rest breaks and making necessary phone calls or other business.
- Adjust your seat, mirrors and climate controls before putting the car in gear.

### 3. Prioritize car safety

- Secure cargo that may move around while the vehicle is in motion. Don't attempt to retrieve items that fall to the floor.

- Have items needed within easy reach: toll fees, toll cards, garage passes, etc.

### 4. Make the time for driving safety

- Pull over to eat or drink. It takes only a few minutes.
- Practice defensive driving and give yourself time to react. Keep a two second cushion between you and the car in front of you – four seconds if the weather is bad.

### 5. Slow down

- Don't speed – it gives you less time to react and increases the severity of an accident.

### 6. Be safe

- Always wear your seat belt and drive sober and drug-free.

# Statistics and Facts About Distracted Driving

[Distraction.gov](http://Distraction.gov)

## What Is Distracted Driving?

***There are three main types of distraction:***

- Visual — taking your eyes off the road
- Manual — taking your hands off the wheel
- Cognitive — taking your mind off what you're doing

Distracted driving is any non-driving activity a person engages in that has the potential to distract him or her from the primary task of driving and increase the risk of crashing.

While all distractions can endanger drivers' safety, texting is the most alarming because it involves all three types of distraction.

## ***Other distracting activities include:***

- Using a cell phone
- Eating and drinking
- Talking to passengers
- Grooming
- Reading, including maps
- Using a PDA or navigation system
- Watching a video
- Changing the radio station, CD, or Mp3 player.

## Did You Know?

### ***Research on distracted driving reveals some surprising facts:***

- 20 percent of injury crashes in 2009 involved reports of distracted driving. (NHTSA).
- Of those killed in distracted-driving-related crashes, 995 involved reports of a cell phone as a distraction (18% of fatalities in distraction-related crashes). (NHTSA)
- In 2009, 5,474 people were killed in U.S. roadways and an estimated additional 448,000 were injured in motor vehicle crashes that were reported to have involved distracted driving. (FARS and GES)
- The age group with the greatest proportion of distracted drivers was the under-20 age group – 16 percent of all drivers younger than 20 involved in fatal crashes were reported to have been distracted while driving. (NHTSA)
- Drivers who use hand-held devices are four times as likely to get into crashes serious enough to injure themselves. (Source: Insurance Institute for Highway Safety)
- Using a cell phone use while driving, whether it's hand-held or hands-free, delays a driver's reactions as much as having a blood alcohol concentration at the legal limit of .08 percent. (Source: University of Utah)

## Examination of Driver Distraction

### ***Driver Distraction Facts and Figures***

Important information regarding driver distraction comes from records of traffic fatalities and injuries collected by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

## Overview

Driver distraction could present a serious and potentially deadly danger. In 2009, 5,474 people were killed in U.S. roadways and an estimated additional 448,000 were injured in motor vehicle crashes that were reported to have involved distracted driving. Distracted driving comes in various forms, such as cell phone use, texting while driving, eating, drinking, talking with passengers, as well as using in-vehicle technologies and portable electronic devices.

There are other less obvious forms of distractions including daydreaming or dealing with strong emotions.

While these numbers are significant, they may not state the true size of the problem, since the identification of distraction and its role in a crash can be very difficult to determine using only police-reported data. New data sources are available to provide more details on the type and presence of driver distraction.

## Highlights

Police-reported data from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) and the National Automotive Sampling show that:

- In 2009, there were 30,797 fatal crashes in the United States, which involved 45,230 drivers. In those crashes 33,808 people died.
- In 2009, 5,474 people were killed in crashes involving driver distraction (16% of total fatalities).
- The proportion of fatalities reportedly associated with driver distraction increased from 10 percent in 2005 to 16 percent in 2009. During that time, fatal crashes with reported driver distraction also increased from 10 percent to 16 percent.
- The portion of drivers reportedly distracted at the time of the fatal crashes increased from 7 percent in 2005 to 11 percent in 2009.
- The under-20 age group had the highest proportion of distracted drivers involved in fatal crashes (16%). The age group with the next greatest proportion of distracted drivers was the 20- to-29-year-old age group – 13 percent of all 20-to-29-year-old drivers in fatal crashes were reported to have been distracted.
- Of those drivers reportedly distracted during a fatal crash, the 30-to-39-year-old drivers were the group with the greatest proportion distracted by cell phones. Cell phone distraction was reported for 24 percent of the 30-to-39-year-old distracted drivers in fatal crashes.
- Light-truck drivers and motorcyclists had the greatest percentage of total drivers reported as distracted at the time of the fatal crash (12% each). Bus drivers had the lowest percentage (6%) of total drivers involved in fatal crashes that were reported as distraction-related.
- An estimated 20 percent of 1,517,000 injury crashes were reported to have involved distracted driving in 2009.

***The National Motor Vehicle Crash Causation Survey (NMVCCS) is a nationally representative survey specifically focused toward documenting events and conditions leading up to crashes.***

- NMVCCS captures distraction as an associated factor to the crash and/or as the critical reason that made the crash imminent. Driver distraction was coded as the critical reason in 18 percent of the crashes. Data describing the specifics of the distraction — for example adjusting the radio or eating — are included in this data set.

***Another method for collecting pre-crash data is through naturalistic driving studies, in which vehicles are equipped with cameras and data recording equipment.***

- During NHTSA's 100-Car Naturalistic Driving Study, driver involvement in secondary tasks contributed to more than 22 percent of all crashes and near-crashes recorded during the study period.

- Data Sources

***The following NHTSA data sources were used in the research:***

- Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS)
- National Automotive Sampling System (NASS) General Estimates System (GES)
- National Motor Vehicle Crash Causation Survey (NMVCCS)
- The 100-Car Naturalistic Driving Study
- National Occupant Protection Use Survey (NOPUS) of Driver Electronic Use
- Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey (MVOSS)

### **Use of Electronic Devices While Driving**

A 2009 survey by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reveals an increase in the use of electronic devices while driving and some regional differences in this practice.

### **Overview**

The percentage of young drivers manipulating a hand-held electronic device while driving has decreased from 2008, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's 2009 nationwide survey, which provides the only nationwide probability-based observed data on driver electronic device use in the United States. The survey shows that the hand-held cell phone use rate in 2009 translates into 672,000 vehicles being driven by someone using a hand-held cell phone at any given moment during daylight hours. It also translates into an estimated 9 percent of all vehicles that had drivers who were using some type of phone (hand-held or hands-free).

### **Highlights**

- Nationwide, those drivers observed visibly manipulating hand-held electronic devices dropped significantly from 1.0 percent to 0.6 percent.
- Some 1.1 percent of drivers 16 to 24 years old were observed visibly manipulating hand-held electronic devices, down from 1.7 percent the previous year
- More drivers in Southern States were observed manipulating hand-held electronic devices (1.0%) than in the other regions of the country (from 0.2% in the Midwest to 0.5% in the West).
- The use of hand-held devices decreased the most in the West, from 2.1 percent in 2008 to 0.5 percent in 2009.
- The percentage of drivers visibly manipulating hand-held devices while driving was higher among females (0.7%) than among males (0.5%).

### **Methodology**

The results above are from the National Occupant Protection Use Survey (NOPUS), which provides the only nationwide probability-based observed data on driver electronic device use in the United States. The NOPUS is conducted annually by the National Center for Statistics and Analysis (NCSA) of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The survey observes usage as it actually occurs at randomly selected roadway sites. The survey data is collected by trained observers at probabilistically sampled intersections controlled by stop signs or stoplights, where vehicle occupants are observed from the roadside. Data is collected between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m.

Only stopped vehicles are observed to allow time to collect a variety of information required by the survey, including subjective assessments of occupants' age and race. Observers collect data on the driver, right-front passenger, and up to two passengers in the second row of seats. Observers do not interview occupants, so that the NOPUS can capture the untainted behavior of occupants. The 2009 NOPUS data was collected between June 1 and June 22, 2009, while the 2008 data was collected between June 2 and June 22, 2008.

## Illinois

- Ban on all cell phone use (handheld and hands-free) for bus drivers (Primary law)
- Ban on all cell phone use (handheld and hands-free) for novice drivers (Primary law)
- Ban on texting for all drivers (Primary law)
- Illinois bans the use of cell phones while driving in a school zone or in a highway construction zone

Note: Illinois defines novice drivers as all drivers under the age of 19.

## GET INVOLVED!

Nearly 5,500 people died in 2009 in crashes involving a distracted driver. Do you want to help put an end to this type of behavior? Here's your chance.

The U.S. Department of Transportation is leading the effort to put an end to distracted driving. We're encouraging people like you to get involved in spreading the word. The key message is to stop engaging in other activities, especially using your cell phone and other electronic devices, while driving. Your primary responsibility as a driver is to operate your motor vehicle and to do so safely! Just "Put It Down" and concentrate on the road. Here you'll find materials that can be used to promote this message by key groups of people, including: community groups, schools, parents, employers, and law enforcement.

Please take a moment to look through these materials, download the files that fit your needs, and help put an end to these senseless driving acts before more people are killed or injured.

## What Parents Can Do

Studies show that parents have a great influence on teen behavior. While you may not think you have great influence, that's it's all about peer pressure, you're still the greatest influence on your teen. Talk to your teen and set rules to keep your teens from driving while distracted. Know the facts and share it with them. Engage your teens in a dialogue about the problem.

Know the law. Many Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) laws have cell phone and texting bans for your drivers. Make sure you and your teen driver know the law and that your teen driver adheres to the rules. In addition to the consequences that you have set at home, if your teen violates the GDL law they could have their license delayed or suspended.

## What Schools Can Do

Create a culture of safety and educate students on the dangers of distracted driving. Make it clear to students that the expectation is that they will NOT talk or text on their cell phones while driving on school grounds. Encourage parents to talk to their teens and set rules.

***Phone in One Hand, Ticket in the Other***

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The best way to help fight distracted driving is to get educated, and this page is a great place to start. Below are answers to some frequently asked questions that will help you better understand the safety threat posed by texting and cell phone use on America's roadways.

1. **Is distracted driving really a problem?** Distracted driving kills. The friends, family, and neighbors of the thousands of people killed each year in distracted driving crashes will tell you it is a very serious safety problem. The nearly half a million people injured each year will agree.
2. **What is distracted driving?** Distraction occurs any time you take your eyes off the road, your hands off the wheel, and your mind off your primary task: driving safely. Any non-driving activity you engage in is a potential distraction and increases your risk of crashing.
3. **I'm a pretty good driver. Can't some people text or talk on the phone and drive safely?** No, they can't. Research indicates that the burden of talking on a cell phone - even if it's hands-free - saps the brain of 39% of the energy it would ordinarily devote to safe driving. Using a cell phone while driving delays your reaction time as much as having a blood alcohol concentration of .08, the legal limit for drunk driving. Drivers who use a hand-held device are 4 times more likely to get into a crash serious enough to cause injury. Texting drivers are 23 times more likely to get involved in a crash.
4. **If it's so dangerous, why do people do it?** Some people still don't know how dangerous distracted driving is. Others know about the risks of texting and talking while driving, but still choose to do so anyway. They make the mistake of thinking the statistics don't apply to them, that they can defy the odds. Still others simply lead busy, stressful lives and use cell phones and smartphones to stay connected with their families, friends, and workplaces. They forget or choose not to shut these devices off when they get behind the wheel.
5. **Who are the most serious offenders?** Our youngest and most inexperienced drivers are most at risk, with 16% of all distracted driving crashes involving drivers under 20. But they are not alone. At any given moment during daylight hours, over 800,000 vehicles are being driven by someone using a hand-held cell phone.
6. **Sending or reading one text is pretty quick, unlike a phone conversation - wouldn't that be okay?** Texting is the most alarming distraction because it involves manual, visual, and cognitive distraction simultaneously. Sending or reading a text takes your eyes off the road for 4.6 seconds. At 55 mph, that's like driving the length of an entire football field, blindfolded. It's extraordinarily dangerous.
7. **Is it safe to use a hands-free device to talk on a cell phone while driving?** So far, the research indicates that the cognitive distraction of having a hands-free phone conversation causes drivers to miss the important visual and audio cues that would ordinarily help you avoid a crash.
8. **Why doesn't the U.S. Department of Transportation make distracted driving illegal?** Passenger car driving behavior falls under the jurisdiction of the individual states, so the U.S. DOT can't ban it. Congress has considered a number of good laws to prevent distracted driving, but unfortunately nothing has passed yet. However, many states have stepped up to pass tough laws against texting, talking on a cell phone, and other distractions.
9. **What else can DOT do to prevent distracted driving?** Even though we can't make texting or talking on a cell phone while driving illegal, we have been pretty busy.

10. **What can I do to help?** We're glad you asked! You've already taken the first step by visiting this site and learning about the dangers of distracted driving. The next thing you'll want to do is protect yourself. Take the pledge to drive phone-free and turn your cell phone off when you turn your ignition on. And if you're a passenger, make sure your driver does the same

## HOW TO MINIMIZE DISTRACTED DRIVING

consumerreports.org

With distracted driving now playing a part in 80 percent of all car crashes, according to a recent Virginia Tech study, and responsible for some 5,500 automotive fatalities annually, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the problem of mobile phone use for texting and talking behind the wheel has become an epidemic. And it's a problem that can be avoided.

Driving can be safer, less stressful, and more enjoyable if you stay off the phone. And one easy way to do that is to take the time to do a little preparation before setting out.

- Choose your music, set the interior temperature, and make any other control adjustments you need to before hitting the road, or wait until you are stationary to make any changes.
- Check phone messages if you need to, and make any necessary calls. Even if you can make hands-free calls, the safest approach is to avoid making calls while driving. Never use the phone in heavy traffic, bad weather, or in other dangerous road conditions. The best is to pull over somewhere safe and make the call.
- Program your navigation device ahead of time, if you use one. And review your route to familiarize yourself with it whether you use GPS or not. If you are not sure, pull over and memorize the next few directions.
- Allow enough time to make your trip without rushing.
- Don't travel with unrestrained pets in the car. An excited animal can be a dangerous distraction, and it can interfere with your ability to control the car.
- Loose items can also be a hazard. Many accidents are caused by drivers reaching to pick up something from the floor.
- Try not to eat behind the wheel. Cleaning up a spill, or trying to avoid one, can easily take your eyes off the road long enough to cause a crash.
- And it may seem obvious, but take care of your personal grooming needs before starting out.

If all drivers can focus on driving, rather than these other tasks, when behind the wheel, the roads would be safer for all.

*"Good Laws coupled with tough enforcement can reduce deadly distracted driving behavior"*

*Ray LaHood*

## TEEN GROUPS WORK TO FIGHT DISTRACTION

Distracted driving is a serious problem that is especially pronounced among teen drivers, but there are a number of organizations who are helping to get the message out to young drivers that cell phones and driving are a deadly combination.

During the research for our April coverage, I spoke with a few teen and high school organizations to find out what they are doing in their communities to increase awareness of this issue among young people. There are impressive efforts underway to curb this danger and quite interesting people behind the wheel. Over a series of blogs, I'll share their stories and insights into their initiatives.

First, we will discuss large, national organizations and how they are getting their message out. In our next blog, we will look at smaller, grass roots organizations started by a few, dedicated people who want to make a difference in their communities.

**Students Against Destructive Decisions** (SADD) is a nationally recognized group that started out 30 years ago with a mission to prevent drunk driving. In 1997, they changed their name in response to student requests to expand their focus into all areas of destructive behaviors.

Their peer-to-peer program provides information and tool kits to help educate and deliver their prevention messages through communities and schools. Currently there are 10,000 chapters and a half million kids involved.

SADD Chairman & CEO Stephen Wallace says they are working to empower kids speak up in dangerous situations and are using social media to portray the behavior as uncool. Their research has found that if asked, 89 percent will stop texting and 68 percent will stop using the phone behind the wheel. However, most don't speak up—46 percent won't tell someone to stop texting. "Kids are fearless. They don't think it will happen to them," says Wallace.

Tire maker Bridgestone launched [Teensdrivesmart.com](http://Teensdrivesmart.com) in May 2010 as a way to put resources into the hands of more parents, teens, and teachers and to educate teens on safe driving. The website has videos, a parent/teen contract for safe driving, a curriculum for teachers, and safe-driving tips. Vice President of Community and Corporate Relations Dan MacDonald says, the information they provide has been well received and there's a hunger for more, because "the scariest thing parents can do is hand the car keys to their teen."

The **National Organization for Youth Safety** (NOYS) is another national organization that promotes empowerment and leadership for teens to take action and help save lives among their peers. NOYS (pronounced "noise") members work with a coalition of agencies and nonprofit organizations to help influence young people. Among its members are organizations such as the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, SADD, and Consumers Union, as well as federal agencies. Youth leaders take their training back to their communities and implement programs in their local area.

The groups we have spoken with say that Facebook, Twitter, and You Tube have been a great way to reach teens on these important messages. Further, the peer-to-peer model in these organizations has been very effective in helping to change behaviors and increase awareness. And for parents and educators, these groups help bring the information and resources to the local community and schools. With more participation and financial support, the word can spread further. As these groups, and the many people we spoke with convey, getting involved can make a difference.