

# Driving Distractions and its affects

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Many drivers today tend to view driving, especially in familiar environments, as a simple everyday task that requires minimal attention. In fact, driving is a complex task that requires your full attention every time you get behind the wheel. At the very least you are:

- Operating a heavy piece of machinery at high speed
- Navigating across changing terrain
- Calculating speeds and distances
- Responding to other drivers, signs signals and obstacles around you

The dangers of distracted driving are real and the evidence speaks for itself: drivers who use cell phones are four times more likely to be in a collision than a driver who is focused on the road. Cell phones and other wireless communication and entertainment devices are a significant visual and cognitive distraction for drivers, with average "eyes off the road" times that increase the risk of collision considerably. At highway speed, a driver sending a simple text message travels the length of a football field without looking at the road.

A recent study shows that when drivers take their eyes off the road for more than two seconds their crash risk doubles. A driver using a cell phone is four times more likely to be in a crash than a driver focused on the road.

In three seconds driving sixty kilometres per hour you travel fifty metres — that's the distance across half a football field. A momentary distraction can result in death or serious injury.

## **Reducing Distractions**

There are a number of potential driver distractions and these may include:

- devices such as hand-held cell phones, organizers and laptops
- reading maps or other material
- grooming activities
- eating or drinking
- tending to children or pets

Managing distractions is easy. The following are some tips to help reduce driver distraction:

- Make it a habit to use your cell phone only when parked, have a passenger take the call or let the caller go to voice mail.
- Before you start driving turn off your cellular phone.
- Identify and pre-set your vehicle's climate control, radio and CD player.
- Attend to personal grooming and plan your route before leaving.
- When hungry or thirsty, take a break.

During the three-month period that followed the law was supported by a comprehensive public education and awareness campaign which informed the public about the new rules. As of February 1, 2010, police started issuing tickets.

As of February 1, 2010, police may issue tickets and drivers can settle out of court by paying a fine of \$225, plus \$50 victim fine surcharge and \$5 court costs, for a total of \$280. Drivers who receive a summons or who contest their ticket by going to court may face a fine of up to \$500.

There are no demerit points associated with an offence, and police will not be confiscating any hand-held devices used by a driver caught breaking the law.

Drivers, who endanger others because of any distraction, including hand-held and hands-free devices, may also still be charged with careless driving and will automatically receive six demerit points, fines up to \$2,000 and/or a jail term of six months. In some cases, your licence may be suspended for up to two years. You may even be charged with dangerous driving (a criminal offence).

In addition to legislation and enforcement, the key to success in combating all forms of driving distraction is education and awareness. For this reason, the ministry is using a variety of media and public education approaches to raise awareness about the new distracted driving law. For example, MTO is working to discourage young drivers from using cell phones and other wireless devices while driving by promoting initiatives such as the iDrive program. This program raises awareness among youth about the risks of unsafe driving behaviour.

A number of safety messages on the ministry's COMPASS signs are on a rotation, and are displayed during 'non-peak' times on roads across Ontario: Cell Phone Users/Drive Now – Talk Later; Safety Comes First/Drive Now – Talk Later; Please Focus on Driving/Avoid Using a Cell Phone.

The ministry has also distributed 10,000 posters and 100,000 brochures in communities, including schools, across the province to remind drivers of all ages to keep their hands on the wheel and their eyes on the road while driving.

Through local initiatives and community-based programs, the ministry's Regional Planners are working across the province with over 150 community groups, stakeholders in road safety, public health officials and enforcement agencies, to raise awareness about distracted driving. New signs on the highway at border crossings inform drivers from other provinces and the US that hand-held devices are prohibited while driving.

Although distracted driving among teenagers is of great concern to traffic safety professionals and has received considerable media attention in recent years, rigorous research on this issue has been limited. Most of the research to date has concentrated on the risks associated with teen passengers and driver cell phone use. Almost no research has examined the many other potential driving distractions often believed to be common and problematic among teenage drivers. For the present analysis, the authors sampled and coded video data with the specific purpose of studying the nature and prevalence of distracted driving among teenagers.

The study addressed a number of questions:

- ü Which distracted driver behaviors are most common among teenage drivers?
- ü Do males and females differ in how often they engage in distracted behaviors, or the kinds of distractions they experience?

- ü Do distracted driver behaviors vary based on the number of passengers and the characteristics of those passengers (e.g., teens vs. adults vs. young siblings)?
- ü Are distracted driver behaviors more common during certain times of day or week (e.g., weekday vs. weekend), and do these behaviors bear any relation to the amount of traffic or other characteristics of the driving environment?
- ü Do drivers who engage in distracted behaviors spend more time looking away from the roadway than drivers who are not distracted?
- ü Are distracted driver behaviors associated with serious incidents such as near collisions, or events involving hard braking or swerving?

Studies show that teenage drivers are at a higher risk for crashes. Opportunities to engage in technology and non-technology based distractions appear to be a particular concern among this age group. As one would expect, speeding substantially increases the likelihood of severe injuries for teenage drivers and their passengers. The results of the analysis also reveal that teenage drivers have an increased likelihood of more severe injuries if distracted by a cell phone or by passengers than if the source of distraction was related to in-vehicle devices or if the driver was inattentive. Additionally, passengers of teenage drivers are more likely to sustain severe injuries when their driver is distracted by devices or passengers than with a non-distracted or inattentive driver. This supports the previous literature on teenage drivers and extends our understanding of injuries for this age group related to distraction-related crashes. Dangerous drinking and driving situations contribute heavily to morbidity and mortality among older adolescents.

Two studies tested the hypothesis that women are more likely than men to focus on themselves and their mood when in a depressed mood, and that this leads them to experience longer periods of depressed mood. In both studies subjects were predominantly Caucasian college students. In our first study, a laboratory study, females chose to engage in an emotion-related task significantly more often than did males, even when this led them to focus on an existing sad mood. In the second study, a prospective naturalistic study, females were more likely than males to evince an emotion-focused ruminative style of coping with their moods. A ruminative response style at Time 1 was a significant predictor of depression scores at Time 2, even after initial levels of depressed mood were taken into account. Furthermore, once rumination levels were controlled for, gender was no longer a potent predictor of depression outcome. The implications of these response styles for treatment are discussed.

### **In Emergencies**

Having a cellular phone in your vehicle can be an important safety aid for drivers and passengers — whether for personal safety or for reporting a crime or a collision.

#### **All drivers may use hand-held devices to call 9-1-1**

If you need to use your cell phone in an emergency — a situation that could result in a danger to your safety or the safety of others if it is not corrected without delay — consider the following tips:

- Pull over safely if conditions allow.
- Keep emergency calls as brief as possible.
- Alert the caller that you are on the road.

- End conversations immediately if driving conditions or situations become hazardous (for example, inclement weather, roadway construction, high-speed or high-volume traffic).
- Be alert to situations on the road where a cell phone's radio frequency and electronics may be potentially harmful such as: construction zones where blasting is occurring, or at gas stations/fuelling areas.

### **Province Introducing New Legislation to Keep Roads Safe**

Ontario is introducing legislation today to help reduce collisions, injuries and fatalities on the province's roads and highways and keep them among the safest in North America.

If passed, the proposed Keeping Ontario's Roads Safe Act and supporting amendments to the Highway Traffic Act will make highways and roads safer by:

- **Increasing fines for distracted driving from a range of \$60 - \$500 to a range of \$300 - \$1,000 and assigning three demerit points upon conviction**
- **Increasing fines for drivers for door cyclists from a range of \$60 - \$500 to range of \$300 - \$1,000 and raising the demerit points from two to three**
- **Requiring all drivers to maintain a distance of one metre when passing cyclists**
- **Requiring drivers to yield the whole roadway to pedestrians at school crossings and pedestrian crossovers**

Ensuring Ontario's roads and highways are safe is part of the government's economic plan that is creating jobs for today and tomorrow. The comprehensive plan and its six priorities focus on Ontario's greatest strengths - its people and strategic partnerships.

### **QUICK FACTS**

- Drinking and driving fatalities represented close to one quarter of all fatalities annually.
- **According to current collision trends, fatalities from distracted driving are forecasted to exceed those from drinking and driving by 2016.**
- Pedestrians represent about one in six motor vehicle-related fatalities on Ontario roads – 41 per cent of which occurred at intersections.

- The proposed legislation would build on existing measures Ontario has introduced to improve road safety, including making booster seats mandatory, ensuring every person wears a seatbelt, introducing stiffer penalties for street racing, bringing in tougher impaired driving laws, and banning hand-held devices while driving.

## QUOTES

"Ontario's roads consistently rank among the safest in North America thanks to our tough laws and strong enforcement, along with the work of our many dedicated road safety partners. Our new legislation, if passed, would keep drivers, cyclists and pedestrians even safer as we get tougher with those who ignore the law."

— *Glen Murray, Minister of Transportation, Minister of Infrastructure*

"Despite Ontario's road safety record, there is still more to do – by targeting impaired, distracted and other unsafe driving with increased fines or penalties, we hope to reduce the tragic and costly consequences of collisions, injuries and fatalities on our roads."

— *Dr. Arlene King, Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health*

“If passed, our legislation will help keep pedestrians, drivers and cyclists safe on Ontario's roads. Thanks to our legacy of tough laws, strong enforcement and partnerships with many dedicated road safety partners, Ontario's roads are among the safest in North America and these new measures are intended to keep it that way.”

– *Steven Del Duca, Minister of Transportation*

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