

Safe Harbors

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A Loss Control And Risk Management Communication



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Distracted Driving

Who doesn't like to be on the road, talking on the phone? It's OK, right? Everybody is doing it, right? Well, it certainly seems so if you look around our roadways these days.

It's shocking to learn, however, how big a toll distracted driving is apparently taking on roadway safety. In fact, a 2010 report by the National Safety Council attributes the following to distracted driving:

- 80% of all crashes
- 2 times increase of rear-end collision risk
- 4 times greater risk of a crash injury
- 18% slower driver reaction times
- Increased levels of traffic violations

Driving distractions impair a driver's ability to keep their eyes on the road, their hands on the wheel, and their minds on the task of driving. So much so that driver distractions have joined alcohol and speeding as leading factors in fatal and serious injury crashes.

So, what distracts drivers when they get behind their wheels? According to the 2010 National Safety Council report, talking on a cell phone continues to be the number one cause of distracted driving. However, there are many other driving distractions, such as:

- Texting
- Emailing
- Viewing GPS navigation
- Interpreting maps
- Eating
- Smoking

And, the above list doesn't even include some of the more typical distractions, like looking at the scenery outside the vehicle, listening to the radio, reading billboards, communicating with passengers, and simply not focusing on driving (i.e., "daydreaming").

While many organizations and lawmakers continue to focus their efforts on preventing drivers from using handheld phones or texting, a growing body of research has demonstrated that the problem is not just in the hands. It's in the mind as well. Contrary to popular belief, hands-free devices do not eliminate cognitive distraction. In fact, some studies show hands-free phones offer no safety benefit when driving.

Research explains how cognitively complex it is to talk on the phone and drive a vehicle at the same time. A 2003 University of Utah study found drivers to be as impaired by distractions as having a blood alcohol content level of 0.08 (the level at which many states declare someone to be illegally driving under the influence of alcohol). In a 2009 study, researchers from the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute observed that 75% of drivers who were using a cell phone committed a traffic violation, while only 25% of drivers who were not on the phone did.

Regardless of how your organization intends to deal with the potential problems of distracted driving, more widespread education seems to be needed on this subject. Consider the following to help



Driving distractions impair drivers' abilities to keep their eyes on the road, their hands on the wheel, and their minds on the task of driving.

avoid distracted driving by your organization's drivers:

- Turn off, or at least turn down, the ringer on cell phones and other communication devices before driving
- Pull over to a safe location and stop the vehicle prior to using a communication device if one must be used
- Avoid unnecessary adjusting of vehicle settings (e.g., mirrors, temperature controls, radio, and GPS navigation) once the vehicle is in motion
- Make sure drivers are well rested, well nourished, and otherwise equipped for the length and purpose of their trip
- Take the time to prepare in advance for the driving trip so as to avoid uncertainty or confusion regarding the routes, stopping points, pickups, etc.

Obviously, driving safely – including avoiding driving distractions – is important for all organizations and their employees. Consequently, to the extent your organization has drivers, we suggest that you consider adopting and enforcing a driving safety policy that seeks to minimize, if not eliminate, as many driving distractions as reasonably possible.

If you would like additional information on distracted driving, please contact a Riverport Loss Control Consultant.

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Home Office:

222 South Ninth Street, Suite 1300
Minneapolis, MN 55402-3332
Main Line: 612.766.3100
Fax: 612.766.3099
Toll Free: 888.762.3083

Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 948
Minneapolis, MN 55440-0948

www.riverportinsurance.com

Western Region Office

1383 North McDowell Boulevard, Suite 350
Petaluma CA 94954-1190
Main Line: 707.766.2580
Fax: 707.766.2581
Toll Free: 800.361.1075

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