

New study finds crash risk four times higher when driver is using a cell phone

A new study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety found that drivers using cell phones are four times as likely to get into crashes serious enough to injure themselves. The study, "Role of cellular phones in motor vehicle crashes resulting in hospital attendance," was published in the *British Medical Journal*.

The Study

The subjects for the study were drivers treated in hospital emergency rooms for injuries due to crashes from April 2002 to July 2004. The study compared phone use within 10 minutes before an actual crash occurred with use by the same driver during the prior week.

"The main finding of a fourfold increase in injury crash risk was consistent across groups of drivers," said Anne McCartt, Institute vice president for research and an author of the study. "Male and female drivers experienced about the same risk from using a phone. So did drivers older and younger than 30 and drivers using hand-held and hands-free phones."

Hands-free Versus Hand-held Phones

A significant finding in the study was that injury crash risk didn't differ from one type of phone use to another. It was not safer to simply switch to hands-free phones.

"This isn't intuitive. You'd think using a hands-free phone would be less distracting, so it wouldn't

increase crash risk as much as using a hand-held phone. But we found that either phone type increased the risk," said McCartt. "This could be because the so-called hands-free phones that are in common use today aren't really hands-free. We didn't have sufficient data to compare the different types of hands-free phones, such as those that are fully voice activated."

Conclusion

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety study is the second to use phone records and the first to estimate whether and how much phone use increases the risk of an injury crash.

For more information, visit the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety's website at www.iihs.org, or contact CTSI at 303-861-0507.