

Distracted Driving

In 2019 alone, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimated that distracted driving accounted for 3,142 driving-related fatalities. Defined as any activity that takes a person's attention away from the primary task of driving, distracted driving is an ever-increasing problem as more and more technology creeps into our vehicles, dividing our focus. Texting, cell phone use, eating, changing the station on the radio, or even carrying on a conversation all count as distracted driving. There are three types of distractions while driving:

TYPES OF DISTRACTIONS

- Visual: taking your eyes off of the road
- Manual: taking your hands off of the wheel
- Cognitive: taking your mind off of the task of driving

Many common activities people engage in while driving can be distracting. One of the biggest and most risky is cell phone use, which causes visual, manual, and cognitive distractions. According to insurance claim data, 19% of auto accidents in 2019 were caused by phone-based distractions.

Driving is a complex task that requires the full focus and attention of every driver on the road. People tend to think that they are good at multitasking, especially while driving; however, study after study has found that the brain cannot give full attention to more than one task at a time. Distracted driving can cause life-changing injuries, and it can be fatal.

TIPS TO AVOID DISTRACTED DRIVING

The best way to avoid distracted driving is to limit distractions before putting the vehicle in drive. Plan your route before starting the trip, as even GPS navigation systems can be a distraction. Set the radio, climate controls, etc., before driving. Do not eat while driving. If you are taking a long trip, plan to stop for food and rest breaks. Put cell phones out of sight and out of reach. Set your cell phone to send an automatic text informing anyone who texts that you are driving and will contact them later, or better yet, turn off your cell phone while in the car. According to one study, using a cell phone while driving reduces your focus on driving by 37%.

Counties can help prevent distracted driving by establishing clear procedures for what is and is not acceptable behavior in county vehicles, such as banning employees from cellphone use while driving. Make safe driving a priority with training plans that encourage employees to pull over if they need to make a phone call, check a map, send a text, or engage in other potentially distracting activities.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR COUNTIES

Auto accidents pose an enormous risk to the county pools and endanger county employees. Implement clear policies that discourage distracted driving in county vehicles. In addition, provide training to county employees about the risks of distracted driving. CTSI offers several safety videos on distracted driving, including "Hang up and Drive" and a "Defensive Driving Refresher" webinar at <https://www.ctsi.org/ctsi-films>. Members will need to log in to view the videos. For more information about the dangers of distracted driving or for information on implementing a fleet safety program, contact CTSI at (303) 861 0507.