

## Driver Distraction

What causes driver inattention? A host of distractions can enter a driver's world and some are preventable while others are not. Sudden noise from another vehicle (e.g., backfiring), another vehicle having a problem (e.g., flat tire), and similar distractions are not preventable. Reading the newspaper, checking the labels on your CD collection, shaving, cell-phone use, and a host of other distractions can be avoided.

Accidents caused by distractions while driving are not a new phenomenon, but as more devices are used by a driver, the risk of having an accident has greatly increased. Today, one device in particular - the cell phone - has become a significant highway safety concern.

Many states and jurisdictions now prohibit drivers from using hand-held phones while driving. While the hands-free approach may, at first, seem like an obvious solution to cell phone-related safety problems, it presumes that crashes caused by cell phone use result primarily from dialing, from having only one hand on the wheel, or from reaching for, holding, or dropping a phone. Although these factors certainly may contribute to a crash, studies suggest that conversation itself is the most-prevalent, single behavior associated with cell phone-related crashes.

### Tips to Avoid Distractions

#### Before Driving

- Know where your vehicle's controls are located so that adjustments can be made without losing concentration on the driving task.
- Make sure all loose objects are properly stowed and secured.
- Adjust mirrors.
- Prepare in advance for needs (e.g., sun glasses, toll money, etc.)
- Make as many adjustments as possible (e.g., radio volume)
- Take care of personal hygiene (e.g., shaving, putting on make-up, etc.)
- Get sufficient rest.

#### When Operating a Vehicle

- Drive defensively – remember, you need to compensate for the actions of other drivers.
- Do not eat or drink.
- Do not read or write anything.
- Avoid smoking.
- Do not use communications devices (e.g., cell phones), except in an emergency.
- Do not engage in distracting conversations.

#### Take a Break

- If you feel your concentration is impaired, park the vehicle in a safe location and take a break.

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