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TEXTING WHILE DRIVING

REAL HAZARDS, STAGGERING STATS



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TEXTING WHILE DRIVING: THE HAZARDS ARE REAL, THE STATS ARE STAGGERING

Texting while driving. Many people do it, despite the fact that it is illegal in most of North America.

The Federal Motor Carrier Administration (FMCSA) defines “texting” as manually entering text into, or reading from an electronic device. Their definition of texting includes, but is not limited to: sending short messages, e-mailing, instant messaging, accessing the internet, pressing more than one button to initiate or terminate a call, or engaging in any other form of text retrieval or entry, for present or future communication.

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Texting increases the chances of being involved in a vehicle-related accident by 23 times. Texting involves three separate physical and mental systems: manual, visual and cognitive. These systems are all utilized together while composing a text message. Utilizing all three of these cognitive systems for one task takes attention away from the road and potential driving hazards.

Startling statistics:

- Distracted driving accounts for nine deaths and more than 1,000 injuries every day.
- Reading a text message can keep a person’s eyes off the road for 5 seconds (at 55 mph, this is long enough to cover a football field).
- In 2015, 3,477 people were killed in crashes involving a distracted driver.
- In 2015, 391,000 people were injured in motor vehicle crashes involving a distracted driver.
- 69 percent of drivers (aged 18-64) admitted to using their cell phone while driving during the previous month.

Despite these statistics, many people still have an incessant urge to text, as soon as they hear the ping on their cell phones. The brain releases dopamine when people perceive a text or notification as pleasant or enjoyable. Because of this gratifying feeling, people have a sudden impulse to check their phones as soon as a text or call comes in. Unfortunately, when people do this, their attention is brought elsewhere and the results can be deadly.

Changing this behavior at the source is what is going to help make our roads safer. There are three steps involved in changing a behavior at its source. These include: recognizing the problem or opportunity, understanding the actions that can be taken, and practicing the new behavior and evaluating results.

Most of us already agree that texting while driving is an issue on our roads. However, refraining from engaging in the behavior is a whole different ball game. There are many strategies out there to manage texting while driving including:

- Turn your phone off completely
- Set your cell phone on silent
- Put your phone completely out of reach (in your trunk, glove box, etc.)
- Download an app that prevents you from texting while driving
- Have your passenger take the call or text and allow him or her to send a response for you
- Utilize hands-free features on iOS and android phones (if your state allows this behavior)

THE INSURANCE INDUSTRY

Texting while driving is not only hazardous, but costly too. The insurance industry has taken notice. Due to the effects that texting has on a driver's ability to make decisions, it is anticipated that insurance carriers may view distracted driving citations with similar severity as a DUI. This could result in company drivers with distracted driving citations on their record being disqualified as a driver and employers being unable to obtaining insurance coverage.

According to carrier guidelines, disqualified drivers include those with an Unacceptable Motor Vehicle Record. That is an employee who has one of the following major violations within the last five (5) years from the date of inquiry:

- Any felony in which a vehicle is used including homicide resulting from the operation of any unreasonable risk or with high degree negligence.
- (DWI/DUI) Driving under the influence of intoxicating liquor or illegal drug.
- Refusal to take a breath analyzer test.
- Failure to stop, report or comply with state statutes when involved in an accident.
- Driving while license is suspended or revoked.
- Reckless or dangerous driving which results in injury to a person.
- Racing.
- Passing a stopped school bus with the stop arm extended and red lights flashing.

Or any of the following over the past three (3) year period:

- Three (3) or more moving violations not specifically listed above.
- Two (2) or more at-fault accidents.
- One (1) at fault accident and two (2) moving violations not specifically listed above.

Best in class fleets contain:

- Management Commitment
 - Driver Selection
 - Substance Abuse Policy
 - Driving Training – including driver observations
 - Accident Investigation
 - Vehicle Maintenance (on a schedule, being monitored)
 - Routing/Scheduling (telematics – driver performance, fuel, mileage logging)
 - Vehicle Security
 - Fleet Safety Rules
 - Recordkeeping
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In an effort to curb distracted and dangerous driving, carriers are beginning to leverage customer data through the use of telematics. Telematics is the technology of sending, receiving and storing information relating to remote objects like vehicles via telecommunication devices. Telematics and GPS fleet tracking systems provide information that helps fleet owners control costs and increase productivity and improve fleet safety.

THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT

Smart-phone base efforts to combat distracted driving behaviors have proven to reduce distracted driving by 20 percent. There are several distracted driving apps available now to combat texting and driving. Each app has its own unique features to encourage safe driving. Listed below are some of the most popular and recommended apps on the market.

Life Saver: Life Saver is a top choice safe driving app, especially for parents and their new drivers on the road.

AT&T DriveMode: AT&T DriveMode is a safe driving app, designed for both iOS and Android. This app disables text messages and blocks calls while driving, and can be automatically set to switch into drive mode when the vehicle exceeds 15 mph.

Mojo: Unlike LifeSaver and AT&T DriveMode, the Mojo app does not block text messages and calls. Instead, it challenges the driver to refrain from engaging in these behaviors and tracks safe miles driven by monitoring frequency of swiping, typing, and calls taken.

TrueMotion Family: True Motion Family is a safe driving app that utilizes GPS to give a "trip score," tracking times one may have been distracted on their drive. This app does not block text messages and calls. However, it sends notifications to the primary app operator when the driver has safely reached their destination, tracks safe miles driven, and allows for location sharing.

Texting while driving apps, as well as the tips and tricks discussed above are fun, easy ways to avoid texting while driving altogether. Consulting your app store to find the right safe driving app that is compatible with your cell phone and lifestyle is one of the first steps to take towards forming those safe driving habits.

The bottom line is that texting while driving is illegal. For those who text and drive, it's just a matter of time before it catches up with them. But, it's never too late to form new habits and stop texting and driving at the source.

WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO

Including a cell phone use policy in your employee handbook is a good business practice. It reinforces your safety culture and shows your commitment to keeping employees safe. A written cell policy should govern the use of cell phones and other handheld devices while operating a personal or company-provided vehicle while performing work duties. You may use this sample language in your policy:

Hands-free cell phone operation is permitted while driving as long as it is allowed by local motor vehicle laws and regulations, and if the driver has the ability to continue to operate the vehicle in a safe manner.

Hand-held use of a cell phone is strictly prohibited while driving. The use of phones is authorized only when the vehicle is parked. A properly parked motor vehicle is one that is completely stopped, and safety placed in park. Vehicles stopped to load/unload passengers are not considered parked; nor is stopped at a stop sign and /or light. Text messaging while driving is prohibited.

Other cell phone uses that distract from driving (entering or manipulating a GPS, reaching for the device, searching the Internet, reading e-mails, social media, etc.) is also prohibited.

You may also consider having your employees set a standard voicemail greeting as a response for when they are operating the vehicle. Doing so will help set employees up for success and reduce the pressure to use their phone while on the road. It is recommended that the voicemail

of every company-issued cell phone be customized to notify callers of your safe driving policy. Below is a sample voice mail script that can be worked into your safe driving program and/or employee handbook:

"You have reach the mobile phone of _____ (name), _____ (title) with _____ (company).

I am either away from my phone or I am driving. For safety reasons I do not use my phone while driving. Your call is important to me. Please leave a brief message, including your name and number and I will return your call as soon as I am able. Thank you."

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