

Know Your Legal Rights

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Distracted Driving Kills: 3 Myths About Distracted Driving

Distracted driving is a serious problem in the United States. With smart cell phones in nearly every car, people are frequently texting and dialing while driving. Simply stated, they are not paying attention to the road. This often leads to tragic results for drivers, passengers, people in other vehicles, and bystanders.

The statistics are staggering: one in six traffic deaths is related to distracted driving. In fact, more than 3,000 deaths each year involve distracted driving. In addition to texting and making phone calls, many drivers multitask by adjusting the radio and CD/DVD players, using GPS navigation systems, applying makeup, eating, drinking, and even reading while driving. Studies have found these behaviors can be worse than driving drunk.

Following are three common myths about distracted driving that you should consider and share with your loved ones.



1. “It’s Not That Dangerous Because This Will Only Take a Second”

Many drivers, especially teen drivers, underestimate the dangers of distracted driving because they think if they can text or dial quickly, they are not really that distracted. However, it only takes an instant for an accident to occur when a driver has taken their eyes off the road and their hands off the wheel. Ever heard the excuse, “but I only looked away for a second”?

Drivers should be aware that texting in particular is the most alarming distraction. Texting drivers are 23 times more likely to get involved in a crash. Five seconds is the average time texting drivers take their eyes are off the road. When traveling at 55 mph, that's enough time to cover the length of a football field blindfolded!

2. “I Can Drive and Talk on the Phone”

Research indicates that the burden of talking on a cell phone saps the brain of 39% of the energy it would ordinarily devote to safe driving. Using a cell phone while driving delays your reaction time as much as having a blood alcohol concentration of .08, the legal limit for drunk driving in most states. Drivers who hold a phone are four times more likely to get in a crash serious enough to cause injury.

In theory, talking on a cell phone in hands-free mode takes away some of the distraction. However, the driver is still mentally distracted when holding a conversation while driving. According to the National Safety Council, driving while talking on cell phones – both handheld and hands-free – increases risk of injury and property damage crashes **fourfold**.

When talking while driving, drivers underestimate the distance traveled and the distance between vehicles. Also, when talking and driving, the driver’s visual field is limited and they can miss important visual and audio cues that would ordinarily help avoid a crash. In all, headset and hands-free cell phone use is NOT substantially safer than hand-held use.

3. “Talking on the Phone is the Same as Talking to a Passenger”

Studies have found that drivers who are distracted by a cell phone conversation are more oblivious to changing traffic conditions because they are the only ones in the conversation who are aware of the road. When speaking with an adult passenger in the car—as opposed to someone via cell phone conversation—drivers have another set of eyes and ears to keep them alert of any traffic problems, including pedestrians and bicyclists. Adult passengers also can adjust the conversation when traffic is challenging, something that cannot be done by someone on the other end of a cell phone.

These tips are a great way to start a conversation with your loved ones about the dangers of distracted driving, especially texting and driving.

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