

Understanding Driver Distraction

Distracted driving can be deadly. Below is a list of common distracted driving issues, with recommendations for how to address them. For more information on this topic, visit nsc.org/justdrive.

ISSUE: **Drivers do not take distraction seriously enough**

RECOMMENDATIONS: Know the numbers. More than 2,800 people in the U.S. died in distraction-related crashes in 2018 alone – that’s at least seven people every day. That same year, 276,000 people were injured in distraction-related crashes.

Drivers should be aware of three major types of distraction: visual (eyes), manual (hands) and cognitive (mind). Most people recognize when they are visually and/or manually distracted and seek to disengage from those activities as quickly as possible. People typically do not realize when they are cognitively distracted, such as when using a cell phone. When your eyes, hands and mind are not focused on driving, you increase the chance that you will make mistakes that can result in injuries or even death.

Show your concern for safety. Employers can demonstrate to employees that they take safety seriously by having a safe driving policy that addresses distracted driving.

ISSUE: **Hands-free is not risk-free**

RECOMMENDATION: Hands-free devices and voice command systems create a cognitive distraction as the driver mentally engages with interactive tasks. While hands-free options may be marginally safer than handheld devices, eliminating driver use of all types of cell phones and in-vehicle infotainment systems is safest.

ISSUE: **Drivers think cell phone use is distracting ... for other people**

RECOMMENDATION: Although 87% of people think talking on a cell phone while driving is a serious safety threat, 49% have talked on a handheld phone while driving. Drivers should talk the talk AND walk the walk, refraining from using their phone when behind the wheel.

ISSUE: **It is impossible to multitask and give equal attention to each task**

RECOMMENDATION: People often think they are effectively accomplishing two tasks at the same time. It is possible to complete a phone conversation while driving and arrive at the destination without incident, but it is a misconception that the tasks can be done simultaneously and as safely as possible. Motorists should make driving the primary focus and perform other cognitively demanding tasks only when safely parked.