

Driven to Distraction

- 18-year-old female charged with gross negligence and vehicular homicide after a series of 15 text messages sent and received while driving resulted in the wrongful death of 77-year-old woman.
- California resident sentenced to 6 years in prison for driving into parked cars while paying bills on phone. Crash resulted in the death of a passenger
- 22-year old male sentenced to 7 years for crashing car while deleting messages, killing 2 teenage girls.

These headlines are not the type that camp directors, parents, or company owners ever wish to read. Especially, when they are caused by or affect their loved ones. Sadly, distracted driving crashes occur on a daily basis with many of those incidents being caused by drivers under the age of 20.

Are any of us who drive a vehicle 100% free of distractions? Perhaps not. The next time you are driving your vehicle take a moment to actively think about how many times your eyes have been diverted from the road to answer the phone, dial a call, look for directions, look at a map, eat or drink. Then imagine an unexpected event to occur while you're momentarily distracted. The key to safe driving is managing these distractions to the lowest possible number and realizing when to pull off of the road to prevent an avoidable incident.

What is distracted driving?

- Visual – taking your eyes off of the road
- Manual – taking your hands off of the steering wheel
- Cognitive – allowing your mind to concentrate on non-driving duties

How does distracted driving affect the driver's skills?

- According to a University of Utah study, using a cell phone while driving (hand held or hands free) can delay a driver's reactions as much as having a blood alcohol concentration at the legal limit of .08 percent (Source University of Utah)

As an owner of a business, what can you do to help keep your employees from operating vehicles while distracted? Here are some tips:

- Develop a written policy to clearly address texting, calls, and other distracted driving activities. The policy should state clear consequences for its disregard.
- Develop a training program to definitively explain distracted driving, the dangers, and how to avoid.
- Encourage or require all van drivers to only make calls when parked.
- If a driver is alone, keep the phone shut off while driving
- Have navigation performed by a passenger.
- Consider training with distracted driving videos from YouTube or other public sources.

Whether you're the owner of a business employing drivers or are the driver, you are a key resource in helping prevent distracted driving. Let's put down the distraction and make it home alive.

Chris Colello, Senior Loss Control Representative, ALCM, ARM, CFPS, Acadia Insurance Company

Additional Resources:

Distracted Driving.gov <http://www.distraction.gov/index.html>

National Safety Counsel www.nsc.org

Negligent Driving.com <http://negligentdriving.com/distracted.cfm>

OSHA <http://www.osha.gov/distracted-driving/index.html>