

Make the choice to drive distraction-free

Distracted drivers pose a deadly risk to everyone on the road. Drivers engage in a range of distracting activities from eating, grooming, reading and talking or texting on their phones. The use of hands-free technologies isn't without risk as dangerous mental distractions exist even when drivers keep their hands on the wheel and eyes on the road.

Four types of driver distraction:

- Visual -- looking at something other than the road
- Auditory -- hearing something not related to driving
- Manual -- manipulating something other than the wheel
- Cognitive -- thinking about something other than driving

Most distractions involve more than one of these types, with both a sensory -- eyes, ears, or touch -- and a mental component.

Available research indicates that cell phone use while driving, whether it is a hands-free or hand-held device, degrades a driver's performance. The driver is more likely to miss key visual and audio cues needed to avoid a crash. Hand-held devices may be slightly worse, but hands-free devices are not risk-free.

Choose to make a difference

The fight to end distracted driving starts with you. Just like buckling up, it's a decision that saves lives. Make the commitment to drive distraction-free today. Learn more about distracted driving and what you can do to promote safer roads for everyone at www.distraction.gov.

Take the pledge to:

- Protect lives by never texting or talking on the phone while driving.
- Be a good passenger and speak out if the driver is distracted.
- Encourage friends and family to drive phone-free.

Save a life. Spread the word and take the pledge to drive distraction-free at www.distraction.gov or www.itcanwait.com.

Distracted Driving By the Numbers

(this should be a side bar piece next to about distracted driving article for WRG)

In Oregon, from 2009-2013 there were 56 fatal crashes, 58 fatalities and 13,188 injuries involving a distracted driver. In addition, 13 fatal crashes, 14 fatalities and 1,204 injuries during the same period were caused by drivers

reported to have been using a cell phone at the time of the crash. That's nearly twenty percent of all distracted driving fatalities linked to cell phone use.

These crashes are underreported. Convictions for cell phone use while driving during the same time period totaled 71,743 in Oregon. That's an average of 14,348 convictions per year. In 2014, there were 17,723 convictions for this offence, a 23% increase over the previous five-year average.

10 tips for managing some of the most common distractions:

- Turn it off and stow it. Turn your phone off or switch it to silent mode before you get in the car. Then stow it away so that it's out of reach.

- Spread the word -- there's an app for that.

Record a message on your phone that tells callers you're driving and will get back to them when you're off the road. You can also sign up for a service or use a cell phone app that automatically notifies callers when you are driving. Check www.itcanwait.com for phone apps and more.

- Pull over. If you need to make a call, pull over to a safe area first.

- Use your passengers. Ask a passenger to make the call or respond to a text for you.

- X the Text. Don't ever text and drive, browse online or read your email while driving. It's dangerous and against the law in most states. Even voice-to-text isn't risk-free.

- Know the law. Familiarize yourself with state and local laws before you get in the car. Oregon prohibits the use of hand-held cell phones in addition to texting.

- Prepare. If using a GPS device, enter your destination before you start to drive. If you prefer a map or written directions, review them in advance. If you need help while driving, ask a passenger to assist you or pull over to a safe location to change your GPS or review your map/directions.

- Secure your pets. Unsecured pets can be a big distraction in the car.

- Mind the kids. Pull over to a safe place to address situations involving children in the car.

- Focus on driving. Multi-tasking behind the wheel is dangerous. Refrain from eating, drinking, reading, grooming, smoking, and any other activity that takes your mind and eyes off the road.

Prevent drowsy driving

Driver fatigue can significantly increase the chance of a crash

Living in eastern Oregon typically includes a lot of travel time on state highways for: work; shopping; medical appointments; visiting friends and family; and just getting out to enjoy the beautiful region.

"Too much time behind the wheel without proper rest breaks, however, can lead to drowsy driving and tragedy," says ODOT spokesperson Tom Strandberg.

ODOT offers the following information about preventing drowsy driving that may just save your life, or the lives of others.

Sleepiness or fatigue cause the following:

- Impaired reaction time, judgment and vision
- Problems with information processing and short-term memory
- Decreased performance, vigilance and motivation
- Increased moodiness and aggressive behavior

Signs that should tell a driver to stop and rest:

- Difficulty focusing, frequent blinking,

heavy eyelids

- Trouble remembering the last few miles driven, missing exits or signs
- Yawning repeatedly
- Drifting from lane to lane, tailgating, excessive slowness or speed

- Feeling restless and irritable

When taking prescription or over-the-counter medications, be sure to read all warning labels. Avoid driving if the medication label indicates it may cause drowsiness.

"While coffee is a stimulant, it should not be relied on to keep a driver awake," Strandberg said. The caffeine jolt from coffee does not kick in until at least one-half hour after it is ingested. "Coffee might wake you up briefly, but the effects are only temporary and wear off quickly."

ODOT suggests the following for long trips:

- Take along a companion to help keep alert and to drive if you become tired.

Schedule rest stops every two hours. While stopped, get out of the vehicle, walk around and stretch. Make sure your are rested before heading back on the road.

Don't take chances with drowsy driving. Know the signs of fatigue and get the rest you need.



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