

Role Models for the Road

Parent Tips

DISTRACTED DRIVERS PART 1

MAY 2007

Driving while distracted is a form of aggressive driving.

If we are busy communicating or “dashboard dining,” we are willfully imposing our own level of risk on **passengers, other drivers, and pedestrians.**

Forcing higher risk on others is aggressive driving! When drivers do this, **they become socially and legally responsible.**

This increased risk, to which others may now be subjected, is similar to other driver behaviors that are considered aggressive and illegal: going through red lights, failing to yield, exceeding safe speed limits, reckless weaving, drinking and driving, driving while sleepy or drowsy, road rage, etc.

Our least experienced drivers – our teenagers – may be the most vulnerable as they try to practice their driving skills while engaging in these potential very risky behaviors.

What does the research indicate about in-car distractions?

Researchers at the University of Utah have found that drivers using cell phones – even hands-free devices – experience a decrease in the ability to process peripheral vision, creating a potentially lethal “tunnel vision.” This “inattention blindness” slows reaction time by 20%.

Y. Ian Noy, Ph.D., CPE Ergonomics Division Road Safety and Motor Vehicle Regulation Directorate, Transport Canada, has observed that drivers modify their “looking behavior” in an attempt to maintain driving performance and, despite strong adaptive behaviors, distraction from in-vehicle tasks cause driving performance to deteriorate.

In other words, keep your mind and attention on the job at hand – which is driving!

What is some sound advice for parents from the experts?

- Examine the sources of distraction available to their sons and daughters.
- Set a good example. Don't drive with distractions.
- Turn off the cell phone.
- Parents must inform their teens of changing laws, such as those in Virginia and other states concerning novice drivers and cell phones.

The Virginia House has passed a bill that further restricts those with provisional driver's licenses. Senate Bill 1039 prohibits the use of wireless telecommunication devices for such drivers while operating a motor vehicle, except in an emergency when the vehicle is either parked or stopped. These restrictions apply regardless of whether or not a hands-free device is used.

Eleven states, including Colorado, Texas, Minnesota, Illinois, Tennessee, Maine, New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and DC have passed some form of law against drivers under 18 talking on cell phones while driving, and Michigan has a bill pending.

Driving while distracted is a huge problem and more than likely will only get worse as new technologies and “gadgets” enter our automobiles.

**PARTNERS FOR SAFE
TEEN DRIVING**
A COMMUNITY HEALTH INITIATIVE

For additional information go to
www.SafeTeenDriving.org

Prince William County Public Schools
Department of Motor Vehicles