

Risk Manager

Answers, resources and information to help assess and reduce risk

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By Mark Nease

The leading cause of workplace fatalities in the United States is due to motor vehicle accidents. Distracted driving plays a significant role in motor vehicle accidents and cell phone use is a major culprit.

Distracted driving is anything that:

- Takes your eyes off the road – a visual distraction
- Takes your mind off the road – a cognitive distraction
- Takes your hands off the steering wheel – a manual distraction

Think about the number of tasks people do when driving that could cause distractions - talking on the cell phone, tending to children or pets and texting and searching sites on GPS devices.

Hands-free devices provide a false sense of safety and do not eliminate cognitive distractions. The brain typically is unable to process two cognitively complex tasks at once. Test this by watching your favorite TV show for 15 minutes and having a conversation on the telephone.

According to the National Safety Council, research shows those drivers who talk on either a hand-held or a hands-free cell phone:

- Doubles the risk of a rear-end collision.
- Slows a person’s reaction time by 18%. The University of Utah conducted a study which shows drivers who used their cell phones had slower reaction times than those drivers who had a blood alcohol content level of 0.08.
- Increases the probability of running a traffic light.
- Makes drivers “look” but not “see”. Drivers tend to miss 50% of what’s in their driving environment.
- Contributes to nearly 25% of all car crashes.
- Quadruples the risk of being in a crash that results in injury.

Is the use of a cell phone while driving worth a life?

Avoid all use of handheld or hands-free cell phone devices when operating a motor vehicle to reduce your risk of injury. To avoid the temptation to use the cell phone while driving, consider:

- Turning off your cell phone before starting your vehicle.
- Modifying your voicemail greeting to indicate you are unavailable to take a call when driving.
- Pulling over to a safe location and making a call.
- Allowing your passenger to make the call or let someone else drive so that you can freely make and receive calls.

Distracted driving can affect any driver. Confronting distracted driving with an awareness campaign to school employees and students is a viable solution to their safety.

For additional information or training on best practices and safety management within your school entity, please contact Director of Risk Management Sharon Orr at (866) 401-6600, ext. 7152 or sorr@cmregent.com.