

Ten-Minute Training Topics

Distracted Driving

Statistics

“The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates that approximately 25% of police-reported crashes involve some form of driver inattention – the driver is distracted, asleep or fatigued, or otherwise “lost in thought”.” – From an AAAFTS publication on Distracted Driving

“Each year an estimated 284,000 distracted drivers are involved in serious crashes.” – University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center

“...drivers were most often distracted by something outside their vehicle (29.4 percent) followed by adjusting a radio or CD player (11.4 percent). Other specific distractions included talking with other occupants (10.9 percent), adjusting vehicle or climate controls (2.8 percent), eating or drinking (1.7 percent), cell-phone use (1.5 percent) and smoking (0.9 percent). – University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center

Introduction

There is always a temptation (especially on long drives) to try to get work done or find interesting entertainment while driving. The trouble is that we can become overconfident in our use of radios, navigation systems or cell phones while driving. Many of you may have seen drivers: reading, applying makeup, shaving, eating lunch (with both hands) and doing other weird activities while trying to drive a car or truck!

This is a growing problem in the United States (and around the world). Recent studies suggest that about 10% of all fatal crashes are due, in part, to drivers who were simply not paying attention to their driving. Nearly a quarter of all crashes—both fatal and nonfatal—were caused in part by distracted drivers.

This Training Topic provides insight into how inattention and distractions can lead to collisions and shares tips on how you can reduce your risk. You may want to share this information with family members and friends.

Inattention versus Distraction?

Inattention is when your mind is focused on something other than driving – planning your next delivery, thinking about your family, etc. This is very dangerous as your reaction time will be much longer than normal if an emergency maneuver is needed to avoid a collision. Inattention is often referred to as “carelessness”.

Distraction typically comes from an external source – billboard messages, radio programs, reaching to steady a tipping mug of coffee, adjusting controls, etc.

There are several groups of distractions:

- Using cell phones, radios and other gadgets
- Passengers (or children if driving the family car)
- Aggressive drivers
- Drowsiness or Illness

General Tips To Maintain Focus

- Keep both hands on the wheel
- Minimize distractions from passengers (avoid talking while driving)
- Avoid taking your eyes off the road
- Check your mirrors frequently – this moves your head and eyes and updates you on conditions around your vehicle
- Think about a path of safe escape if a dangerous situation occurs suddenly in front of your vehicle – Rear End collisions are very common for inattentive or distracted drivers
- Be especially careful near construction zones – traffic patterns can change suddenly, large equipment may merge and the altered road surface can affect control

Deal with Drowsiness

- Get plenty of rest, maintain a balanced diet, don't rely on coffee to carry you
- Take breaks if you recognize the danger signs (nodding off, excessive daydreaming, etc)
- When practical, share driving responsibilities on long trips

Stay Calm When Driving

- Emotional upset can be very distracting – your mind may focus on the stressful issue rather than the highway and surrounding traffic.
- Don't "respond" to aggressive drivers actions – they are trying to play an emotional mind game that could lead to injury or death – ignore them or seek help from the police.

Avoid “Rubber-necking” or “Gawking” at Crashes, Fire Scenes, etc.

- Avoid slowing down to look at a crash or other activity.

If You Must Use a Cell Phone:

- Know and practice your company's policy on cell phones and driving – NO EXCEPTIONS
- When possible to do so safely, pull off the road and stop in a safe place before using your phone
- Avoid distracting or complicated conversations – even if you use a hands-free device!
- Let the person you're talking to know that you're driving; if necessary, call them back later if you are in heavy traffic or hazardous weather
- Never take notes or look up phone numbers while driving
- Do not engage in stressful or emotional conversation that might divert your attention from the road

Summary

At 45 miles per hour, a driver glancing away for two seconds is driving blind for a distance of 132 feet—almost half the length of a football field. As a result, the driver's reaction time is shortened dramatically. Looking away from the road, reaching to pick up something from the floor, or letting your attention focus on anything other than driving can have immediate, deadly consequences.

Stay focused. Plan ahead. Be aware of your surroundings. Avoid the temptation to “get lost” in conversations, talk radio programs or respond to aggressive drivers. Talk to your managers, family and friends about other ways to avoid distraction or inattention while driving.

SafetyFirst has additional information on: Cell Phone Use, Aggressive Drivers and Drowsiness if you have additional concerns.

Stay Focused – Avoid Distracted Driving!

- Minimize distractions – focus on the road ahead, not gadgets or the radio
- Get rest to avoid drowsiness, stay calm
- Anticipate other motorists and pedestrians actions
- Use mirrors to check around your vehicle
- Plan escape routes, be prepared for stopped vehicles



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