IN TRODUCTION

Julie Townsend, Brake’s campaigns director, says:
“It’s easy to get distracted. We have busy lives, with lots going on in our heads. Given that driving is such an everyday activity for many and modern vehicles are comfortable environments, it’s little wonder many drivers allow their minds to wander or are tempted to multi-task, by using a phone for example.

The sad fact is this can be fatal. Researchers don’t know the exact extent of the carnage resulting from driver distraction because crash data is limited, but studies referenced in this report indicate it could be one of the biggest killers on roads. What is clear from the drivers surveyed in this report is driving while distracted is endemic, sometimes due to stress and other emotions caused by life pressures or other road users, but also through drivers making a conscious decision to use a phone or fiddle with their stereo or sat nav.

This report calls on drivers to remind themselves of the appalling possible consequences of momentary lapses and commit to keeping their full attention on the safety-critical task in hand.

We also need the government to ensure laws that aim to keep drivers focussed are properly enforced, by making traffic policing a national policing priority and increasing fines for mobile phone use and careless driving offences. This report shows drivers think the threat of being caught is low, something which no doubt contributes to an ongoing complacency about distracted driving.”

Andy Goldby, Direct Line’s director of motor underwriting, says:
“It is well known there can be many distractions when driving and while some are out of our control, many are well within it. Placing yourself in a stressful situation, using a phone or other device that takes your attention from the road for even a second means drivers are risking their own and others’ lives.

Mobile phone technology has become such an intrinsic part of our lives, more or less an extension of ourselves, that many drivers feel it is perfectly acceptable to drive while talking, texting, emailing or even surfing the web on their phone. There is no excuse to undertake these activities and although since the new laws were enacted many people have been caught and rightly punished, we continually hear of deaths and injuries caused by drivers using their phone at the wheel. Surprisingly this a message that doesn’t seem to grab their attention.

When we drive we are subconsciously using many skills that are essential to control the vehicle, being aware of others and knowing how to get to our destination. When we are distracted suddenly we are not in control of the vehicle and it only takes second for a collision to happen.

Drivers need to plan their journey to reduce their stress, switch off their phones so they are not tempted to touch them and most importantly focus on the job at hand, which is to get to their destination safely.”

About this report

This report is divided into four parts, which will be published one at a time at www.driverpoll.com as results are released through the media. These parts are on the following topics: driver stress; mobile phones; sat-navs; and other in-vehicle distractions.

This is the fifth in a series of reports on safe driving by Brake and Direct Line. It examines attitudes and behaviour in relation to driver distractions among drivers and motorcycle riders. The report is based on a survey of 841 drivers and riders carried out by Brake volunteers in 2011, at a range of locations across the UK. Every effort was made to ensure a wide variety of people responded. Repeating some questions from a survey carried out in 2006 by Brake and Green Flag has enabled some analysis of any changing driver attitudes and behaviour over the intervening period.

Brake thanks the volunteers who helped conduct the survey and collate the results. For other reports in the series, visit www.driverpoll.com
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

The government should:

- Ban the use of hands-free mobile phones when driving in line with research showing it dramatically increases crash risk.
- Change the law so being caught using a mobile phone while driving results in a disqualification for a minimum 12 month period, to provide a real deterrent from this dangerous behaviour; failing this, at the very least we need a far higher fixed penalty fine for this offence.
- Make roads policing a national policing priority, ensuring resources are put into higher levels of roads policing, enabling an increase in patrols to catch drivers who flout the law.
- Run high-profile publicity campaigns to warn of the dangers of driving while distracted. This should include avoiding distraction from hand-held and hands-free mobile phones, sat-navs, changing music tracks, eating and stress.
- Conduct further research into the relative dangers posed by drivers using sat-nats, to establish whether regulation is needed, such as banning certain types of system that pose particular risks.
- Consult on the use of two-way radio systems in commercial vehicles, taxis and emergency service vehicles and consider restricted use of such devices.

For advice on safe driving, general information on road safety and details of road safety campaigns and events, including Road Safety Week, visit www.brake.org.uk or www.roadsafetyweek.org.uk. For more information on government campaigns on safe driving, visit the Department for Transport’s Think! website, www.thinkroadsafety.gov.uk
DRIVER STRESS

Q1: Within the past 12 months, have you driven while not concentrating because you felt stressed, annoyed or upset due to these factors...

The vast majority of drivers – seven in ten (71%) – have lost concentration at the wheel in the past year because of stress or emotions caused by inconsiderate road users, worries about work or tension at home. By far the most common cause of stress is other road users.

Figure 1: Causes of drivers losing concentration due to stress in the past year

a: the behaviour of other road users?
Six in ten (60%) have lost concentration because the behaviour of other road users made them feel stressed, annoyed or upset.

- 5% said about once a day or more frequently
- 10% said several times a week
- 10% said about once a week
- 11% said about once a month
- 25% said only once or twice
- 39% said no
- 1% did not answer

b: work stress?
Four in ten (39%) have driven while not concentrating because of being stressed by work.

- 3% said about once a day or more frequently
- 4% said several times a week
- 6% said about once a week
- 6% said about once a month
- 17% said only once or twice
- 61% said no
- 2% did not answer

c: personal issues?
More than four in ten (44%) have lost concentration because of personal issues causing stress or upset.

- 1% said about once a day or more frequently
- 4% said several times a week
- 7% said about once a week
- 7% said about once a month
- 25% said only once or twice
- 56% said no
- 1% did not answer

THE FACTS: DRIVER STRESS

Research shows distress negatively affects driver performance. Heightened emotions such as stress, anger or upset are a form of cognitive distraction that significantly impedes drivers’ ability to spot hazards. The level of distraction depends on the level of distress felt.¹

End Note
¹ Emotionally involving telephone conversations lead to driver error and visual tunnelling, The Open University, 2011