

Driven to distraction

TEXTING AND SMART PHONES

ADVICE: USING PHONES AT THE WHEEL

Communications technology is developing at a startling rate and many of us are becoming used to being connected 24/7 via social networking through mobile networks. Increasingly, mobiles act as phone, sat-nav, music player and social media provider all wrapped up in one, and there are many systems available to hook up your smartphone to your vehicle.

But however much you love your phone, when you are driving you need to put it away. Texting, tweeting, emailing, taking or making a call, inputting details into a GPS application, tapping the screen, repeatedly glancing at or watching the screen: all are major distractions that put your life and the lives of others at risk. Driving is the most dangerous and complex activity most of us do on a daily basis and it requires your full concentration. Your phone can wait.

Q2: Within the past 12 months, have you driven while sending or reading a text message?

A horrifying three in 10 drivers (28%) has texted at the wheel in the past 12 months and one in 13 does this at least once a week.

- 1% said about once a day or more frequently
- 3% said several times a week
- 4% said about once a week
- 4% said about once a month
- 16% said only once or twice
- 71% said no
- 1% did not answer

LOST LIFE

Maureen Waites

In November 2006, Maureen Waites, a self-employed hairdresser from County Durham, was killed in a high speed crash.

The car that crashed into Maureen's Citroen was driven by 19 year old Rachel Begg, who had been texting at the wheel. Following the collision, it was found that Begg had used her phone nine times in the 15 minute journey prior to smashing into Maureen's car. Travelling at around 70mph, Begg drove into Maureen's car, killing the 64 year old grandmother instantly.

Q3: Within the past 12 months, have you driven while using the internet or an app on your phone, for example emailing or checking updates on a social networking site (excluding using it as a sat-nav)?

One in 11 drivers (9%) surfs the web, emails or uses social networking sites when driving.

- 0% said about once a day or more frequently
- 2% said several times a week
- 1% said about once a week
- 1% said about once a month
- 5% said only once or twice
- 90% said no
- 1% did not answer

THE FACTS: TEXTING AND SMARTPHONES

Texting distracts from driving cognitively, physically and visually. Texting isn't just about SMS messages. It can involve responding to emails, social networking, inputting navigational data or using other mobile phone applications. In the United States, death from distracted driving has been increasing and researchers put this down to increases in drivers using smart technology².

Research into the impact of sending or receiving text messages in young drivers found the amount of time drivers spent with their eyes off the road increased by up to 400%. Drivers made 28% more lane excursions and 140% more incorrect lane changes³. Research using a driver simulator to explore risks drivers face when using phones for emailing found a heightened crash risk⁴. In a large-scale study of commercial drivers, which monitored the impact of them texting at the wheel, their crash risk increased to 23 times that of a driver paying full attention⁵.

End Notes

- Trends in Fatalities From Distracted Driving in the United States, 1999 to 2008, University of North Texas, 2010*
- The effects of text messaging on young novice driver performance, Monash University Accident Research Centre, 2006*
- Speech-based E-mail and driver behaviour: effects of an in-vehicle message system interface, The University of Leeds, 2004*
- Driver Distraction in Commercial Motor Vehicle Operations, the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute, presented at the International Conference on Driver Distraction and Inattention in Gothenburg, 2009*