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Driver Distractions

Be alert, don't get hurt

When was the last time you talked on your cell phone while driving or ate behind the wheel? If you are like most drivers on the road today, you are doing it regularly and putting yourself and others at risk.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration approximately 80% of auto accidents and 65% of near accidents resulted from some kind of driver distraction within three seconds of the event.

Common driver distractions include:

- § Talking or texting on a cell phone
- § Touching up makeup or hair in the rearview mirror
- § Talking with other passengers
- § Adjusting the radio
- § Allowing your dog to sit on your lap
- § Eating
- § Reading directions or a map



Drivers who use cell phones while driving are four times more likely to be involved in an accident, whether they use a hand-held phone or a hands-free phone.

A study done by Carnegie Mellon University shows that using a cell phone while driving is

similar to driving under the influence. Their research showed that just listening on a cell phone while driving is enough to distract a driver.

In the study, 29 volunteers used a driving simulator while inside an MRI brain scanner. They steered a car along a virtual winding road, driving at a high, fixed rate of speed. They were tested while driving undisturbed, and while driving and trying to decide whether a sentence they heard was true or false. The researchers measured activity in 20,000 brain locations, each about the size of a peppercorn.



After a thorough analysis of the data, the researchers were able to conclude that:

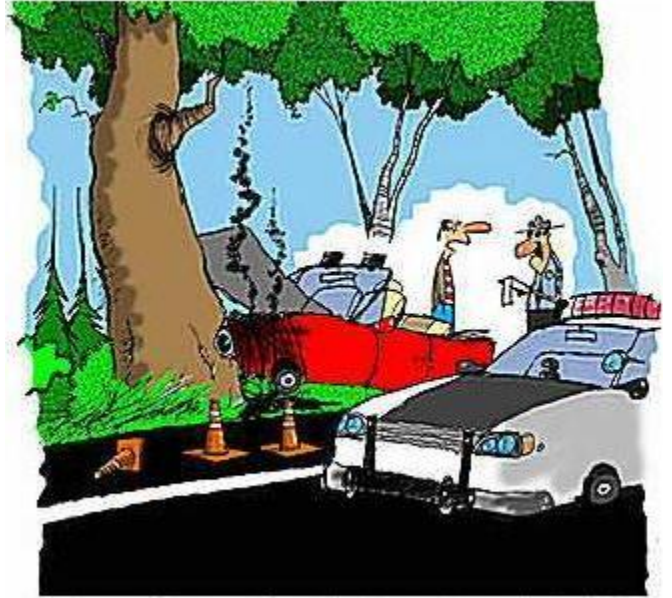
When the drivers were tested while listening to the sentence to see if it was true or false, they lost 37 percent of the normal activity of their brain's parietal lobe. The parietal lobe assimilates all the information the body receives from the senses, and uses it to determine how near/far perceived objects are. There was also a decrease in the activity of the occipital lobe, which assimilates visual information.

Drivers also lost their ability to control the car. They not only were unable to stay in their lane, but they frequently hit objects such as guardrails. These are the kinds of driving errors most closely associated with motorists who drive while under the influence of alcohol.

Consider the following anti-distraction tips:

- § Keep your hands on the wheel by programming your favorite radio stations, and arranging tapes and CDs in an easily accessible spot. Don't attempt to retrieve objects that have fallen on the floor while driving.
- § Teach your children the importance of good behavior in the car.
- § Avoid eating and drinking while driving. If you must, choose easy-to-handle foods and keep beverages in a nearby cup holder.
- § Designate the front-seat passenger to serve as navigator rather than fumbling with maps and navigation systems yourself.
- § Avoid stressful or confrontational conversation while driving.

In addition to avoiding distractions, you'll also want to give driving your full attention by driving defensively to minimize your risk of an auto accident. Driving defensively means you are aware of the drivers around you and make adjustments to your driving accordingly.



"I was sending an email to a client from my laptop when I spilled the coffee I was drinking, while I was on my cell phone. So you see, officer, it wasn't my fault."