



# Cell phone distracted driving: Understanding the dangers

Today there are more than 320 million wireless connections in the U.S. Although public opinion is turning against cell phone use while driving, many admit they regularly talk or text while driving. Why is that? People tend to think they are better drivers than everyone else around them. We've all seen a driver distracted by a cell phone, but when you are the one distracted, you often don't realize that driver is you.

## Risk

Drivers using both handheld and hands-free cell phones are four times as likely to crash.

## Frequency

At any given moment, there are far more drivers using cell phones on our roadways than there are drivers distracted by other risky activities (like applying mascara or reaching into the back seat). About nine percent of all drivers are talking on cell phones at any day-light moment, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

## Prevalence

Cell phone use while driving is widespread. More than 2 in 3 drivers report talking on their cell phone while driving, and nearly 1 in 3 said they do so fairly often or regularly according to an annual AAA Traffic Safety Foundation survey.

## Hands-free is no safer

Hands-free devices give drivers a false sense of security as multiple studies show they provide no safety benefit. Here's part of the reason why:

**Cognitive distraction** – We might think the brain “multi-tasks,” but the brain actually does not process two mentally demanding tasks at once. Instead, the brain switches back and forth between two tasks. When a driver is talking on a cell phone, his or her brain “toggles” between the cell phone

conversation and the task of driving. The brain prioritizes activities and the driver can actually become secondary.

**Looking but not seeing** – A cell phone distracted driver may be looking through the windshield and still miss seeing half of the roadway environment around the car. Distracted drivers experience what researchers call inattention blindness – similar to tunnel vision. Drivers look out the windshield, but their brains do not process everything

necessary to drive safely. For example, cell phone distracted drivers might look directly at a red light, but that doesn't mean they actually process the need to stop.

Drivers who used their cell phones and were involved in a crash likely believed they could use their phones safely. They didn't start their call with the intention of injuring or killing another person or themselves. Don't become a statistic. Make today the day you stop using your cell phone while driving.

