



Safety Culture

Text Messaging and Cell Phone Use While Driving

October 12, 2009

Safety Impacts

- Numerous studies have shown that cell phone use impairs driving performance and increases crash risk.
 - Studies using driving simulators have found that using a cell phone while driving significantly impairs a driver's reaction time^{1,2} and increases crash risk.³
 - Studies of the cell phone records of crash-involved drivers suggest that using a cell phone while driving is associated with roughly a quadrupling of crash risk.^{4,5}
 - A study using in-vehicle data collection equipment to monitor a sample drivers over an extended period estimated that dialing a cell phone nearly tripled the risk of being involved in a crash or near-crash, talking on a cell phone increased risk by about 30%, and each contributed to about 3.6% of crashes and near-crashes overall.⁶
- Text messaging while driving is a relatively new phenomenon and has been studied much less extensively than cell phone use while driving. However, preliminary results reported from two forthcoming studies suggest that this behavior is extremely dangerous. For example:
 - A study conducted in which college students text messaged while operating a driving simulator reportedly finds that text messaging increases crash risk by a multiple of 8.⁷
 - Preliminary findings from a naturalistic study of a sample of heavy-truck drivers suggest that text messaging while driving increases truck driver crashes and near-crashes by a factor of 23.⁷

Trends in Usage

- A nationally-representative telephone survey by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety conducted April 15 – May 12 2009 found that over two out of every three drivers admit talking on their cell phones while driving in the past month, and over one in five admit reading or sending text messages or emails while driving. Rates of self-reported texting and emailing while driving are highest among teenage drivers; rates of cell phone use are highest among young- and middle-aged adults⁸ (See Figure 1).
- Data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the AAA Foundation shows that self-reported cell phone use while driving has increased significantly for drivers of all ages. For example, although the proportion of drivers ages 75 and older who admit talking on cell phones while driving is lower than for other age groups, it has more than doubled, from 9.5% in 2003 to 20.6% in 2009.^{8,9}



Car crashes rank among the leading causes of death in the United States.



- NHTSA's observational studies report that 6% of drivers were talking on handheld cell phones, an estimated additional 5% were talking on hands-free cell phones, and 1% were "visibly manipulating hand-held devices" (e.g., dialing or text messaging) at any given daylight moment in 2008.¹⁰

Public Opinion

- A nationally-representative telephone survey by the AAA Foundation found that well over 9 out of 10 drivers (94.1%) consider it unacceptable for a driver to send text messages or email while driving, and nearly 7 out of 8 (86.7%) consider drivers text messaging and emailing a very serious threat to their personal safety. Over half of drivers (54.9%)

who admit texting or emailing while driving say it makes them much more likely to be involved in an accident; 19 out of 20 (94.2%) acknowledge that it makes them at least a little bit more likely to be involved in an accident.⁸

The same survey found that 70.4% of drivers consider it unacceptable for a driver to use a hand-held cell phone, 37.5% consider it unacceptable for a driver to use a hands-free cell phone, and 57.8% consider drivers talking on cell phones a very serious threat to their personal safety. 14.7% percent of those who admit talking on a cell phone while driving say that it makes them much more likely to be involved in an accident, and 83.2% acknowledge that it makes them at least a little bit more likely to be involved in an accident.⁸

- A nationally-representative survey by Nationwide Insurance conducted in August 2009 found that 80% of Americans support laws bans on text messaging or emailing while driving. The same survey found that 57% of Americans support laws restricting any cell phone use while driving.¹¹

The AAA Foundation's survey, in contrast, found that only 46% supported a law against "using any type of cell phone while driving, hand-held or hands-free, for all drivers regardless of their age."⁸

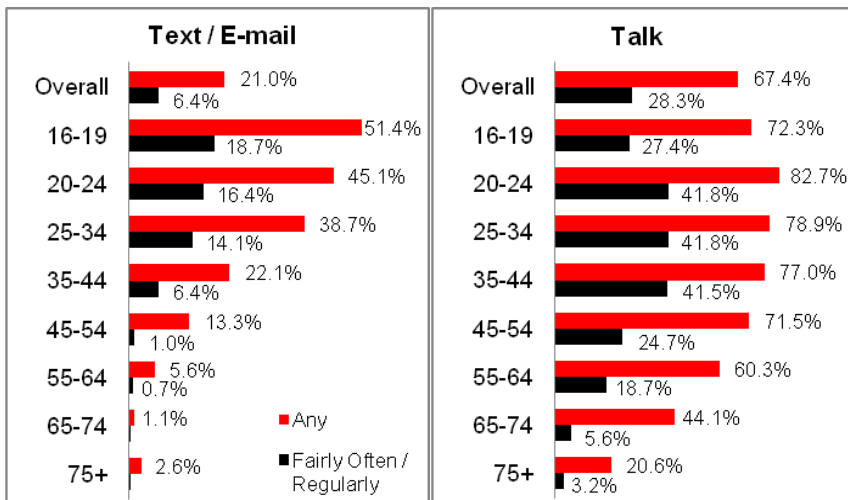


Figure 1. Percent of drivers who report talking on a cell phone (left) or text messaging or emailing (right) while driving in the past 30 days.⁸

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